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SETH SLOCUM, RAILROAD SURVEYOR; Or, THE SECRET OF SITTING BULL.

A TALE OF THE GREAT NORTHERN PACIFIC ROAD-BUILDING.

BY CAPTAIN FRED. WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "NEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS," "RED RUDIGER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," "THE MAN IN
RED," "DEATH'S HEAD CUIRASSIERS," "PHANTOM KNIGHTS," ETC., ETC.



AS SOON AS THE DISK WAS RAISED, THE BULLETS BEGAN TO PATER.

Seth Slocum, RAILROAD SURVEYOR;

OR,

The Secret of Sitting Bull.

A Tale of the Great Northern Pacific
Road-Building.BY CAPT. FRED WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "OLD DOUBLE SWORD," "A YAN-
KEE COSSACK," "ALLIGATOR IKE,"
"PARSON JIM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE LEVELING PARTY.

OUT in the valley of the Yellowstone, not many years ago, a column of cavalry had come to a halt about the middle of the afternoon.

The horses of half the command had been turned out to graze, while the rest stood in line, saddled and bridled.

Part of the men were cooking coffee over little fires of sticks; the rest were gathered under some trees, near a line of saddles and arms.

Four or five mounted men were riding slowly to and fro in a large circle, drawn round the command, and the head of a very long string of wagons and mules could be perceived by the aid of a good field-glass, about six miles off, crawling slowly up the course of the river toward them.

A lovely valley was that of the Yellowstone, before civilization had approached it, with perpendicular cliffs, like the Palisades of our own Hudson, lining the course of the stream; but, unlike our Palisades, standing several miles apart, and bordering a green, smiling meadow that sloped down to the edge of the river, all sprinkled with flowers of every hue, a perfect paradise for game.

Herds of elk, deer, and antelopes, with a few dark groups of buffalo were feeding in full sight of the cavalry horses, so near that it was evident they had little fear of man, while more than one troop of wild mustangs, shyer than the rest, kept far on the outskirts, out of gunshot, or pranced to and fro in frolic pursuit of each other, their spotted and pied hides making them look like a pack of hounds.

Between the feeding cavalry horses and trains might be seen a little clump of horsemen, who kept up an irregular progress by fits and starts.

Every now and then this group halted and remained still for several minutes, a single man galloping ahead with a long pole, to halt after a while at the waving of a flag in the group left behind.

Then would ensue some mysterious signals between the poleman and the others, after which the party would come on at a very rapid pace to the position previously occupied by the single man, who, in his turn, started away again, full speed.

A careful scrutiny with the glass would reveal the fact that the course of this party was always nearly on a level, and that it was marked as it went by little conical heaps of white stones, gathered from the river-bed by men detached for the purpose from the main party.

"They're leveling pretty fast to-day," said one of the cavalry officers, a handsome young fellow in a dandified buckskin suit, sometimes worn on the plains by officers who are vain of their personal appearance, and well provided with money.

He spoke to one of his brother officers, a tall, dark-faced man with a huge drooping mustache, that overhung a short beard of a few weeks' growth.

The young officer was Lieutenant Kennedy, the older man Captain and Brevet-Major Ireland; both of the cavalry escort of General Chester's column, guarding the surveyors of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Ireland nodded absently. He was a gloomy man to be with on a scout, for he was a hard drinker in garrison, and the deprivation of his accustomed stimulants was apt to make him sullen and morose, till the march had lasted some time and his nervous system had got toned up.

"Ay, ay," he said, "fast enough, I suppose. I wish the cursed thing were over."

"Why?" asked Kennedy, surprised. "I think it's delicious, this camp-life, with these pleasant marches, and all this game. The scenery, the bracing air, every thing I see, makes me happy."

Ireland drew his heavy brows together, as he replied, ill-temperedly:

"Of course, of course. You youngsters are always crazy on a first expedition, and we've seen no Indians yet. You'll alter your opinion when you see them."

"I hope I shall do my duty when I do," replied Kennedy, rather stiffly. "I don't pretend to be an old Indian-fighter like yourself, major, but I really do hope I shall not disgrace the cloth when my time comes."

Ireland looked at him more kindly.

"I don't believe you will, Jim. Don't mind what I say. I believe my nerves are going to pieces since the general shut down on the whisky, confound him for a temperance fanatic! Hello! they are coming on fast, ain't they? We'll have to move on further, I expect."

The little party of men with the leveling tripod and staff had indeed come up abreast of them, and had dismounted between the cavalry and the river.

One of them was setting up the leveling-stand on its tripod, the bearer of the staff was galloping ahead; the sound of a bugle startled up the cavalrymen and set the horse-herders to driving in their animals toward the saddles while the men who had kept their chargers saddled began to tighten their girths and get ready to mount.

Kennedy took his own horse and rode up to the leveling-party to ask:

"How much longer do you expect to work to-day, Mr. Graves?"

A stout, bearded man, with a field-book in his hand, went on muttering and scribbling for several seconds before he looked up, to answer hurriedly:

"Just as long as the light holds and this level continues, sir. Montana George tells me there's good camping-ground any place for twenty miles further. Must make hay while the sun shines. Go on, boys."

Kennedy saluted politely, and went back to his party, where he reported to Major Ireland the engineer's determination to go on.

Ireland frowned in his usual morose way, but made no observation, and gave the signal to the bugler.

The cheery notes of the brazen clarion, sounding "Prepare to mount—Mount!" were followed by the departure of the first company on the road, while the men of the second saddled up as fast as they could, following their leaders in less than five minutes.

The officers of the escort, except perhaps Kennedy, looked ill-tempered as they set out on their renewed journey.

Belonging to the regular army, they believed in taking life as easily as possible, and earning their pay with the least practicable exertion, while the engineer-party, being in the pay of a railroad company, kept pushing ahead to get as much work done as could be crammed into a day.

The engineer, Graves, was a plain, hard-working man, with no affectation in his dress and manner, and the men around him were as plain as himself.

Most of them were laborers and pioneers—sturdy, powerful frontiersmen—and only one was young.

He was a good-looking youth, hardly more than a boy, with a downy fringe of beard round his face, a fresh color, and bright, keen brown eyes. He wore a dress more dandified than most of the others, with a buckskin coat fringed and bead-embroidered, a broad-brimmed gray felt hat, a gay silk handkerchief round his neck, and neatly-fitting boots on his feet.

In common with every man around, he had a revolver in his belt, and wore a long sheath-knife like a sailor.

As soon as Mr. Graves had taken his front and back sights, he spoke to this young man, saying:

"Get her on, Slocum. We've not many hours more to work."

"Very good, sir," was the response, and Slocum picked up the leveling tripod, put it over his shoulder and went for his horse, which stood patiently by.

Galloping away with a big spirit-level and stand on one's shoulder is no joke, and Mr. Graves always did his work at a gallop, when he could, so that young Slocum held the hardest post in the party.

They made their next station about a quarter of a mile further on, and the ground beyond was such a fine continuous level that in less than half an hour they had traversed four miles and kept the cavalry scouts on a sharp trot to maintain their distance in advance.

It was while the staffman was actually abreast of the skirmish line, and Mr. Graves was noting down his hind sight before he took a squint at the advance staff, that the sound of five or six shots fired in a volley came down on the startled ears of the party, and the staffman dropped by his pole, which fell with him.

In a moment, the commander of the cavalry escort yelled out:

"Deploy as skirmishers! Gallop—march! Advance carbines! Forward—forward!"

There was a little confusion and hesitation among the men, but they got out on the line and galloped forward, firing as they went, into a clump of woods ahead, from which the volley had come.

At the edge of this wood they now saw half a dozen mounted Indians, with long red streamers in their war bonnets, waving their hands and shaking their rifles tauntingly, as if daring the soldiers to come on.

Mr. Graves, the engineer, whose back was to the flagman, heard the noise, and turned his head to look at the soldiers advancing; then he said to his men in his gruff, business way:

"Come, don't stare. Attend to your own affairs; make up the monument. The escort will take care of us."

And without another glance at the fight going on so near him, he slewed round his telescope to bear on the place where the staff had been.

As soon as he saw that it was down, he uttered an impatient:

"Pshaw! how unfortunate! Here, one of you ride ahead and set up that staff."

Even while he spoke, the cavalrymen of the escort made a charge on the Indians; the second company followed the first, and out of the woods came tearing a regular cloud of mounted Sioux, the rattling of whose rifles as they rode and shot was like the patter of hailstones on a roof.

The whole valley ahead was full of men, galloping to and fro, while the cavalrymen of the escort formed a line, sprung off their horses, and opened a rapid fire to check the Indians, whose bullets came whistling over their heads, all round the little leveling party.

And under these circumstances Graves repeated impatiently:

"Set up that staff, I say. I can't afford to stop here. Who'll go?"

No one stirred, for every one saw that the post of the advance staffman was close to the skirmish line and a position of great danger.

Graves looked round as if not believing the evidence of his senses, asking:

"What! Will no one go?"

Young Slocum touched his hat.

"If some one will take the level, I'll go, sir," he said, and Graves nodded.

"Go," was his sole answer.

CHAPTER II.

WORKING UNDER FIRE.

"Go," said the engineer, and Slocum, without another word, went to his horse and galloped to where the poor staff-bearer lay, stone dead, his body riddled with bullets. The horse of the dead man stood by the body, looking at it curiously, as if not able to understand the sudden change in its master, but not offering to run away, and Slocum sprang off his own horse and led it, with its companion, between him and the Indians, when he picked up the staff and set it up again, with his back to the enemy and his face to Mr. Graves.

It was a trying position to occupy, for as soon as the disk was raised, the bullets began to patter into the ground all round him, or whistled past his ears with a sound that was perfectly new to the young man, who had never been in battle before. And the most trying part of all was that he had to keep his back to the bullets and shut his ears to the sound, while he attended entirely to the signals that Graves made to him, from time to time, to move his staff right or left, and shift the disk to the proper height to show the level.

Trying as it was, the young man did his duty with surprising coolness, and very soon Graves waved his hand to signify the level had been taken, mounted his horse and galloped on to the skirmish line, carrying the leveling tripod on his own shoulder, and followed, but more slowly, by his men, who hung back as they approached the line. The old engineer, on the other hand, cantered up leisurely, swung himself off his horse, and called out as he set up the tripod:

"Hurry up and make this monument. We move on as soon as the escort does."

Then he proceeded to set the tripod over the place where Slocum had set up his staff.

"Go ahead as soon as the escort moves," he said, while he was arranging the stand. "I don't want to put you into useless danger, but this line has to be run as far as we can on this trip, to save the appropriation."

Then he began to take his hind sights at the rear man, who, on his part, was shaking at his post, while the old engineer seemed to be entirely unaware of the battle that was going on around him, so intent was he on the business before him.

As for young Slocum, with him to hear was to obey, and he instantly mounted his horse and wheeled round to watch the Indians, taking with him by the bridle, the steed of the dead staff-bearer, as a partial shield against the bullets that came whistling by him.

As he looked, the Indians who had been dashing to and fro in front of the troops, suddenly began to scatter and run, when the soldiers uttered a yell of triumph and sprung to their horses.

"Forward!" roared Major Ireland, and the men mounted and dashed on again, firing rapidly as they went.

Young Slocum never hesitated, but followed at a trot, till he came to the end of the level on which he was, when he wheeled round his horse again, and planted his staff as he dismounted.

Graves was already waiting for him, and within a very few seconds the new sight was taken, and the engineer's party came galloping on again.

When Graves came up the second time, he nodded to Slocum with a grim smile.

"I'll remember you, my boy," he said as he rearranged his tripod. "Did you ever take a sight, yourself?"

Slocum colored slightly.

"Yes, sir, at college."

The engineer favored him with a rapid, scrutinizing glance, as he settled the plumb-bob to swing clear of the ground.

"College? Hem! What college?"

"Columbia," was the answer with a still deeper flush, as the young man turned to go to his horse and ride on.

The old engineer laid his hand on the boy's arm, as he was mounting.

"Stop a moment," he said. "Did you graduate in mathematics or not?"

Slocum bent his head and said, almost inaudibly:

"Yes, sir."

Old Graves pursed up his lips, but only said:

"Hem! hem! Go ahead. Don't be rash now. Keep inside the skirmish line. Don't want to lose you, just yet."

Slocum mounted and galloped away with the staff, which he planted just as the cavalymen again came to a halt. He kept his back resolutely turned to the fray, though he heard a tremendous noise behind him, and attended strictly to his business, till Graves waved his hand. Then, he hardly knew what impulse made him plant the pole deep in the ground, and begin to gather stones himself to form a monument, instead of waiting inactive till Graves's party came up.

Whatever the cause of the impulse, he obeyed it, though the noise round him grew louder than ever, and not till he had formed quite a noticeable little heap of stones did he look up to find what was going on.

Then he saw that the cavalymen were on their knees or lying down, firing with the utmost rapidity; that quite a number of horses lay dead on the line, and that the Indians, in a dense body, were galloping along the front of the soldiers, full speed, firing as fast as they knew how, and coming closer every moment.

He looked for Graves, and saw the indomitable engineer just coming up, no longer at a canter, but walking his horse and all alone, without the tripod, around which the men were still gathered, making the monument to mark the place.

As he came up, Graves said quietly:

"You did quite right to mark the last station. I don't think we can do any more work to-day, but I've got it all down, and the company can't complain."

He was looking at the Sioux as he spoke, not appearing to be in the least concerned about their vicinity, and young Slocum felt a thrill of admiration he could not conceal as he answered:

"I hope I've done my duty satisfactorily to-day, sir. I only wish I could do it as coolly as you do."

Graves nodded.

"Ay, ay, you've done well, Slocum. Let me see. How came you out here? I didn't know we had a college graduate among our axmen. I must see you're promoted."

Slocum colored high with pleasure.

"Thank you, sir. I came here because my professor told me that if I wanted to be a good engineer I must begin at the bottom. So I have."

The old engineer seemed pleased with the answer; for he replied:

"He told you right. You'll make a very good hand at the business. We want cool men for this sort of work among the Indians. Look here. I'm going to send you back to the chaining party."

Slocum cast a glance at the contest that was raging so close to him, and his voice had a tinge of regret as he said:

"Very good, sir, if you wish, but—"

"But you'd rather stay here and join in this fight, I suppose," said the engineer, grimly.

"Well, young man, when I was your age, I might have felt the same perhaps, but business is work, and fighting's not business, except for those lazy soldiers, who are paid to do nothing else. We came out here to run this survey as far as we could make it go, and for no other purpose. Go you back to the chaining party, and hurry it up. Keep two sets of men on if you like, to measure from monument to monument, so as to bring up the work to this last station. I'm afraid we shall get no further this summer, and I want to get the work complete, as far as it goes. Be off, sir."

Slocum touched his hat and was wheeling his horse, when Graves added:

"Stop a minute. You say you've done this work before. How much of it?"

Slocum answered him modestly.

"I worked at it for two years before I went to college, sir, to get money to pay my tuition fees. I've leveled, surveyed, plotted and done all sorts of railroad work, but only in the east."

Graves had been scribbling in a note-book while he talked, and now he tore out a leaf and handed it to the young man.

"They may object to obeying you, he said.

"If they do, show them that. I want the chain line run up to this very last station, un-

less you find the Indians over it when you arrive. Good-by."

Slocum hesitated no more.

He took the paper and galloped away, reading as he rode:

"MR. SETH SLOCUM'S orders will be obeyed as Assistant Advance Engineer by all parties, he having been appointed such by me to-day."

"SAMUEL B. GRAVES,

Advance Engineer in Chief."

It was a wonderful step for the young man, to be attained so soon, and his heart beat high with hope as he rode back, though the firing in his rear was growing fiercer with every moment.

Ahead of him, several miles off yet, he could see the wagons and pack-train, with two companies of infantry in the advance, coming up at a slow run, and increasing their distance from the wagons every moment.

The chaining-party, whose duty it was to measure the distance from station to station as Graves leveled, had long ago fallen behind the rapid advance of the engineer-in-chief, and was only a little ahead of the infantry soldiers, when Slocum dashed up.

It was in charge of a thin, nervous-looking personage, Mr. Travers by name, who, as soon as Slocum rode up, called out:

"What's going on in front, my mah? We can't go on any further, can we? It's getting to be too dangerous. What are the orders?"

"The orders are," replied Slocum, as he took out his paper, "that I take command of this party and bring it on quicker—that's all. You've a spare tape, haven't you?"

Mr. Travers stared at him aghast.

"You take charge of my party? Why, you're only an axman!"

Slocum held the paper out to him.

"Read that! I'm Seth Slocum mentioned in it. Have you a spare tape?"

Travers looked at the paper and muttered:

"Assistant advance engineer! Good Heavens! what have I done to be snubbed like this?"

He handed it back sullenly, and said aloud:

"All right, sir. Take charge. But I'll see if the company tolerates favoritism of this sort. No; I've no spare tape. There's only one here. The other's my private property, and the company don't need it."

Slocum nodded and flushed slightly.

He was a young man, and Travers was forty. He was fresh at his duties, and Travers an old hand. It was a delicate position for him to be placed in, to have charge of his senior; but his pluck had placed him there, and he saw that Travers looked frightened at the rapid rifle-firing in the front.

He got off his horse and took from the saddle-bags his own steel tape, one of the few appliances he had been able to buy at the East before coming out.

"Let's go ahead, sir," he said to Travers. "I will lend the company my tape, and we can alternate so as to double the work."

Travers sneered:

"Hum! how do I know whether your tape is to be depended on?"

"You're not required to know," was the sharp retort, for Slocum's young blood was up at the tone of his jealous senior. "I'm responsible for the work from this station. Give me your field-book, and sign it as far as you have gone."

Without a word, but scowling with hatred, Travers did as he was told, and the chaining-party set out, going just twice as fast as before, and straight toward the scene of the battle that still raged in the advance up the valley. The further they went, the paler got Travers.

CHAPTER III.

THE INDIANS' CHARGE.

OUT in the advance, meanwhile, the two companies of cavalry were having all they could do to keep off the Indians, who had gathered in front to the number of three or four hundred, and were sweeping to and fro, yelling and firing in the usual style of Indian warfare.

Slocum kept steadily at his work till the noise of bullets, singing in the air over his head, warned him that he was getting near the skirmish line, when Travers, whose turn it was to go ahead, broke out:

"It's an outrage, sir—an outrage! We're not soldiers. It's not our business to go into a danger of this sort. I'll not stir another step. I've a wife and family to care for."

Slocum looked at him with some contempt.

"Go back to the train, then, and I'll tell Mr. Graves you didn't dare come on."

Travers burst out swearing angrily.

"You! Yes, you think you're a hero, don't you? You've nothing to lose. If these men take my advice, they won't go a step further."

"Slap!"

At that very moment a bullet struck the earth and knocked a shower of dirt into Travers's face, nearly blinding him for a moment, so that he shouted:

"Oh, my God, I'm hit!"

And with that, he dropped the end of his

tape and fairly ran off, as hard as he could, while the chainmen, old hands on the frontier, grinned to each other, and Slocum said to one of them:

"Take Mr. Travers's place, and go on. I'll keep the field-book, while you chain."

"Better leave the horses behind, hadn't we?" said an old plainsman, doubtfully.

Slocum started and nodded.

"Why, yes, of course. I never thought of that. They belong to the company. You take them back, Bill Blunt."

Another man, Herndon by name, gave a short laugh as he took up the end of the chain, observing:

"Yes, boys, send the horses back. They costs money. Men doesn't. We ain't worth as much as the beasts, but it's all in a day's work, ain't it?"

Slocum felt the implied reproach, the more that the speaker was a brave man, who obeyed orders coolly.

He went to him and took away the tape.

"You can go back out of danger," he said, quietly. "I order no man on this service. It's a matter of volunteering. I'll carry this end of the chain. You can all go back, if you're afraid to go where I go."

Herndon stared at him a moment in surprise, and then broke out with an oath of jolly profanity:

"You're a man, you are. Go back on ye! Not by a jugful! I ain't that kind. Come on, boys, and work lively."

And on they went, on foot, with a rapidity, now that they were working on honor, and not by compulsion, that fairly amazed Slocum, who became so absorbed in his work that he did not notice how close he was getting to the field of battle, till he came to the station beyond the dead body of the staffman who had first been killed, when the Sioux fired from ambush, and realized that his task had been performed.

The distances between the stations had been measured, and the field-book, in his breast pocket, joined to the other in Graves's possession, gave the materials for a complete section of the country through which they had passed, up the valley of the broad Yellowstone river.

As he jotted down his last figure, he had time to look up and around him.

The scene had changed since he was there before. Where the cavalymen had been, was a line of dead horses, with quite a number of human bodies and wounded men, but the Indians had drawn off from the immediate front, and the fire had slackened considerably.

Major Ireland, on foot, was walking up and down the line, encouraging his men, and Graves was seated, a little way back of the skirmishers, behind a big bowlder, his field-book on his knees, figuring away as calmly as if at home.

Slocum turned to his men to say:

"Get under shelter; the work's done."

Then he walked over to where Graves was sitting, and, as he looked toward the train, saw that the infantrymen had halted and thrown out a skirmish line on the flank away from the river, where the red war-bonnets of Indians, and the pied and spotted hides of their chargers, began to be visible.

Graves looked up absently from his book as Slocum approached; but nodded and smiled as he recognized the young man.

"Well?" he asked.

Slocum showed him his field-book.

"The work's done, sir. Do you want it?"

"No; keep it yourself. What did Travers say?"

"Well, sir, he looked angry at first, but—"

"But gave in. I know what I'm about. He couldn't have chained up to that last spot for his life. Where is he now?"

"I let him go back, sir. He was hit by the dirt of a spent bullet, and half blinded, so he was no use at the front."

Graves grinned in his grim way.

"Never was much use, when there was hard work to be done. There; that finishes my figures, till we go to plotting. I make the grade a pretty easy one for the last hundred—Hullo! what's that?"

Their attention was attracted by a burst of firing toward the train, and, looking back, they saw that a heavy body of Indians had dashed out of the woods bordering the valley, and were circling round the infantrymen, who, on their part, had collected in a circle and were fighting for all they were worth, while beyond them again the wagon-train had been corraled, and more Indians were attacking it, the little cavalry escort in the advance being left entirely alone.

Old Graves, for the first time that day, looked uneasy, and said to Slocum:

"Come to the line. This party will be wiped out in five minutes if we don't look out for ourselves."

He went up to Major Ireland, and said in a hurried, anxious way:

"Major, we're too far off, and the Indians are between us and the command."

Major Ireland looked gloomily over at the strife going on, and said:

"I know that, sir. If you had stopped in the

First instance, we should have all been together. You gentlemen of the railroad don't consider men's lives as amounting to much, I see, and if this escort is destroyed, it will be your fault. Your men haven't fired a shot to help us."

Graves looked as sour as himself.

"We're not paid to do that sort of work, sir. You have charge of that. You could have stopped, as well as I. But it's no use to stand here disputing. What do you propose to do?"

"Hold my position till the infantry come up," said the cavalry officer, stiffly.

"Is there anything I can do to help you?" asked Graves.

Major Ireland laughed rather bitterly.

"Is there anything? What a question! Yes, of course there is. I've lost nearly a fourth of my men. Put in yours to help, if you don't want to lose your hair. Look over there, and see what's going on."

There was no need to look, for the fast-increasing noise told that the battle was waxing furious.

Graves called out to his men:

"Get carbines and all the ammunition that you can, boys, and join in with these soldiers. We'll be attacked in ten minutes."

The frontiersmen needed no second bidding to do as they were told. One or two of them had their own Winchester rifles belted to them, but the majority had but a single revolver and a knife, and it needed no experience to tell them that a desperate struggle was approaching.

They ran to the dead bodies of the soldiers on the line and took all the weapons and ammunition they could find, not a contemptible quantity by any means.

Slocum managed to secure a Springfield sporting-rifle, that had belonged to one of the young officers, shot dead at an early period of the fight.

He took the pistol-belt from a dead soldier and hunted up in the saddle-bags of the horses nearly a hundred rounds of ammunition.

When he had loaded himself up and was still at a little distance from the main party, he heard Ireland shout out:

"Get together, boys, and give it to 'em! Here they come!"

The young engineer looked up and never afterwards forgot the sight he saw.

A cloud of dust was between him and the train, and it seemed as if the whole valley was full of Indians, riding straight for the cavalry escort, crouched over their ponies' necks, flogging away with their short whips, and yelling as they came with a shrill intonation that was peculiarly appalling, mingled, as it was, with the incessant cracking of rifles.

"Hi-yah! Hi-yah! yup! yup! YUP! YUP! woo! woo! woo! Hoo! Hoo! HOOOOO!"

"Crack! crack! crack!" went the rifles, and the bullets came singing over the soldiers, buzzing like a swarm of bees, slapping into the dirt all round them, while the yelling increased into a tempest of sound.

Slocum, entirely unused to battle, and left alone about fifty yards from the command, felt bewildered for a moment, and then, seeing that he could not reach his comrades in time, dropped instinctively on the ground behind the dead horse, whose saddle he had been searching for cartridges, and opened fire on the Indians.

The next few minutes were to him a mere whirling dream of confusion and blood. He fired as fast as he could with his rifle; saw the cavalymen enveloped in a perfect sheet of flame; found himself surrounded with Indians, who came down on him like hawks on the wing, clutching at him as they passed, and nearly succeeding in carrying him off.

Twice he was lifted from the ground, and twice he freed himself by firing with his two revolvers into the faces of his foes, who dropped him among the horses' feet.

He felt several wounds in the confused melee, but was conscious all the time that the Indians were in a desperate hurry, trying to escape from some one behind them, while the firing on the other side had become a continuous rattle. He was on his feet again, firing on all sides, with no lack of targets, and all the time running toward the cavalymen under Ireland.

How many steps he had run he could not tell, when two stalwart Indians came swooping down on him again, one on either side, and each seized an arm and lifted him from the ground, while he kicked as hard as he could at their ribs to make them let go their hold.

A third horseman came rushing at him from behind, and he felt his hair seized by a strong hand, when he twisted in the air with a superhuman effort, tore himself loose from the first two, and grappled with the man that had his hair, both rolling off the pony on the ground, where they struggled fiercely.

Slocum had been a member of the college gymnasium and was a stout, active young fellow enough, while the Indian, as it happened, was a slender young warrior, who had hoped to steal a scalp unawares.

In a very few seconds Slocum had hold of his adversary's knife-wrist, and was bucking his head into the Indian's face with all his force.

Then something struck him on the back of the head and he fell senseless himself.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOST FIELD-BOOK.

WHEN Seth Slocum came to his senses, it was night, the stars were shining down on him; and he lay on the grass, with his head on something soft, which he soon found to be a dead body—that of an Indian.

Trying to turn his head, he felt a pain and stiffness in the back of his neck that reminded him he had been hurt; but managed to look from side to side, and found himself surrounded by camp-fires, tents and wagon-tilts, horses at picket-ropes, teamsters and soldiers stirring about in the usual routine of camp life, cooking and getting ready for bed.

No one seemed to notice him, till he managed to struggle up to a sitting posture, when a voice called out to him:

"Hello! I thought you were gone up."

Slocum tried to smile and rubbed his head:

"I'm not dead yet, I hope," he answered.

"Did we whip the Indians?"

His interlocutor came up to him, one of the cavalry corporals, and said:

"Whip 'em? Well, yes, we drove 'em off, but they laid out a heap of us."

Slocum felt his head, then his limbs, to find if he was badly hurt, and finally made shift to ask:

"Who laid me out on that body?"

"Reckon I did," was the reply. "We found you, after it was all over, lying on the ground, with the Indian on top of you. He was shot through the heart, and had his hand in your hair, where he'd been trying to scalp you. His face was all mashed in too. Reckon one of the horses kicked him. And you had a hole in the back of your head. Thought you was dead, sure; but I didn't like to see a red atop of a white man; so I yanked him off, and laid you out decent. Let's see if you're hurt much."

Slocum managed to scramble up dizzily, and stood leaning on the corporal for a moment.

"I think not," he said. "It must have been a bullet stunned me. My head aches consumedly. Where's your doctor?"

"Out yonder by the wagon."

And the corporal helped him over to where a couple of tired-looking gentlemen, with bare arms, stood by a table made of trestles and boards, that had been set out by the tail-board of one of the wagons.

On the table lay stretched a man with his eyes closed. One of his trowser-legs had been slit up to the middle of the thigh, showing a leg that had been just amputated below the knee, the stump neatly bandaged. The man wore a soldier's uniform and was under the influence of chloroform, and one of the surgeons said, looking round:

"Here, steward, steward, get to work at this man. He's pretty weak. Who's next?"

Four men came and took away the insensible soldier, and the corporal saluted the doctor, saying:

"Here's one of the citizens, doctor, got hurt. Thought he was dead."

The senior surgeon turned to Slocum, saying roughly:

"Well, my man, what's the matter with you? You railroad men brought on all this muss, and now we've got to foot the bill, I suppose. Come, what is it?"

Slocum, a moment before, had been weak and trembling, but the callous way of the doctor stung him into drawing himself up and retorting:

"I don't know that it's worth while to trouble you, sir. If we brought on the muss, as you say, at least we took our share in it, and I had an idea that the first duty of a physician was to heal the sick, not to insult them."

It was not the retort, but the language in which it was couched that seemed to impress the surgeon.

He had looked on Slocum in his frontier dress and unkempt hair as only one of the railroad laborers, but he found that he spoke like a person of refinement. So he looked a little ashamed, answering:

"Well, well, what's the matter, sir? Are you sick or wounded?"

"I'm not sure," replied Slocum. "I was hit on the back of the head, and it aches very badly. Will you be kind enough to examine me? That's all I ask."

The doctor said nothing more of a harsh nature, but did as he was asked, and made a careful examination of the young man, taking every limb from head to foot.

When he had finished he said:

"You had a narrow escape, sir. How were you engaged when you were struck on the head?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Slocum, in a weary way. "I think I was having a rough-and-tumble fight with an Indian, but I don't remember very much about it."

Here the corporal saluted.

"Please, sir, I saw the gentleman. He was cut off from our people, and he did fight like a team of wild-cats. I seen him have the Injun down, bucking him in the face, when he dropped, and I thought he was 'shot.'"

"That accounts for it," said the doctor, cu-

riously. "That bullet was fired at the back of your head, and it has raked up and passed out under the skin. You've got a terrible headache, hey?"

Slocum smiled ruefully.

"Splitting."

"Well, you'll have to go to sleep and get the shock worn off. What's your name, sir?"

"Slocum, assistant advance engineer."

The doctor looked surprised and held out his hand.

"Mr. Slocum, indeed? I've heard of you."

"Where?" asked Slocum, listlessly, for he felt very wretched just then.

"From my old friend, Professor Nathans. He sent me word that a gentleman of your name had come out here to wield an ax with the common laborers to learn to be an engineer, but I'd no idea you were in *this* party. I tell you what it is, Slocum, you must sleep in an ambulance to-night, and I'll take care of you for the old man's sake. You've got several bullet grazes, but we'll have you all right in a day or two. I'll fix you up."

Slocum felt grateful for the offer, but said:

"Thank you, doctor. I must get back to my own people. Was Mr. Graves hurt?"

The doctor's face fell.

"Graves? Why, don't you know? No, of course, how could you?"

Slocum felt a thrill of fear.

"He's not—not dead?"

The doctor nodded.

"Yes. He was killed in the rush, just outside the line, and the Indians, in their passage, managed to carry him off and mutilate him shockingly in front of us all. His body, or what was left of it, was brought in an hour ago."

Poor Slocum broke down in his weak state and sobbed:

"Poor Graves! My only friend! The red villains! Oh, if I only could have saved him! He was the only man who was kind to me of all of them!"

"Mr. Russell has come up and put that man Travers in charge," said the doctor, in rather a disgusted tone. "Travers came galloping back before the battle was fairly on and hid himself in a wagon. He's a sneak, but I suppose it's all right. We shall go back at once. This fight has put a stop to the expedition and I hear that some valuable notes have been lost."

Slocum's head was too dizzy to take much note of what was said, but he managed to ask the doctor:

"Is Mr. Russell here?"

The doctor nodded.

"Certainly. He's very much cut up about it. It seems there's some appropriation of Congress that was conditioned on this survey and—"

"And what's lost?" asked Slocum. "Not the field-book, surely?"

"I believe that's what they said."

"Then I must see Mr. Russell at once," said Slocum, with a great effort. "Where is he now, doctor?"

The doctor shook his head.

"You're not fit to see him. You can't talk business for a day or two."

"I must, doctor," said the young man, trying to look straight before him, but ready to fall with dizziness. "I shall worry more, if you don't let me go, than if you go with me. I've only a few words to say."

The doctor looked at him keenly and closely for near a minute.

"You do look as if you were worrying over it. Well, come with me. I'll take care of you. Russell's out here."

He led Slocum away to a fire in front of a large wall-tent, by which stood two gentlemen—one an officer.

Slocum recognized General Chester, commander of the column, a tall man, with gray hair, and a stern, careworn face, in the officer; while in the stout person with mutton-chop whiskers, he found the much-dreaded chief engineer, noted for his sharp, exacting ways over employees.

The general was pacing thoughtfully up and down, talking to Russell, when the doctor approached, and he wheeled round in his stern, imposing way to say:

"Well, doctor, well—what is it? We're busy."

But the surgeon, like all of his class, was not easily abashed, and answered:

"Can't help that, general. Here's a gentleman who was badly hurt to-day; one of the engineers; wants to report to Mr. Russell, and he'll have trouble with his head if he don't do it. He was with Mr. Graves."

Here Russell broke in.

"Excuse me, general; if he really has anything to say, I'd like to hear it."

The general waved his hand politely.

"By all means. Speak on, sir."

He turned his eyes on Slocum very kindly, for the pale face and bandaged head of the young man inspired pity.

Slocum, by a violent effort, cleared his head so far as to say:

"Mr. Russell, I hear—you've lost—a field-book."

Russell looked at him eagerly.

"Yes—yes, two. Do you know anything of them? Who are you?"

Slocum felt in his breast, and drew out the field-book with Graves's order in it, and handed it to the engineer, saying:

"I'm Seth Slocum, sir."

Then he got so faint that General Chester noticed it and brought out a camp-chair, saying to him kindly:

"Sit down; you're hurt."

Slocum sunk into the chair, while the engineer eagerly looked over field-book and order, one after the other.

When he had finished this, Russell said:

"I don't understand this, sir. This is Mr. Travers's book. He told me that it was taken by the Indians, in the hands of one of the ax-men who was killed."

Slocum's head was clearing as he sat resting, and he answered:

"I had charge of it, sir. You'll see where he signed his work. It was in my pocket when I got hurt. Mr. Graves sent me to supersede Travers."

Russell compressed his thin lips.

"I see, I see. Hem! hem! You've done well, sir, as far as you go; but this is only one book. It gives only the distances. Where's the elevation book? Do you know?"

"It was in Mr. Graves's pocket," said Slocum. "I saw him put it there before the fight began."

Russell pursed up his lips fretfully.

"Then it's gone for good. Heavens, what a misfortune! General, we shall have to do all the work over again, backward."

"It can't be done," answered Chester promptly. "My orders don't extend to sacrificing this whole command for the sake of your company. The Indians are up, and we'll have to retreat at once, and keep well together. I can't let any more escorts go out. That's flat."

Russell looked as if he had lost all hope, for he said in a mournful way:

"And all our work's thrown away. Well, if we are ruined, it can't be helped. This book's only half the work without the other."

Slocum here ventured to speak:

"If a man went among the Indians to get that book, sir, what would the company say and do if he found it?"

Russell stared at him doubtfully.

"Say and do? Why, young man, do you know that a subsidy of ten millions hangs on that book? The man that gets it could make his own terms with us."

CHAPTER V.

MONTANA GEORGE.

A WEEK later, the Northern Pacific Railroad Survey Expedition was wending its slow and sorrowful way homeward to Fort Black on the Missouri. Mr. Russell had gone ahead as soon as they got out of the Indian country; and Seth Slocum, pale and weak, but able to ride again, had left the ambulance in which he had been lying for three or four days, and was ambling ahead of the column over a green undulating plain of rich grass, feeling his health coursing back with every breeze.

They were out of danger from the Indians, for they were fast nearing the settlements, and the guides had little or nothing to do, the trail being as plain as a high-road.

Slocum, whose position as assistant advance engineer, though confirmed by Mr. Russell, had become one involving no duty since the recall of the expedition, was riding ahead of the long column in company with one of the guides, the same "Montana George" who had been trusted by Graves as giving the most reliable information.

Montana George's full name was, George F. Rockwell, but he had lost that long before for his nickname, except on the pay-rolls of the company, where he was set down by his legal appellation.

George was not a Government scout, and had a good deal of contempt for many of the men who were employed by the officers in the capacity of guides.

He was a quiet, modest fellow, who dressed in a neat business suit when he went to Chicago, which he had to do every few months to make reports or receive orders.

No one would have taken him at such times for a frontiersman, for his hair was cut short, and his manner was as quiet and unobtrusive as if he had been a poor bookkeeper on a low salary.

On the plains he was a different man, dressed in leather, and armed with a long-range rifle and pair of revolvers.

Slocum had grown to like him from the fact of Graves having trusted him, and the boy had a half-superstitious veneration for any whim or liking of his dead chief; but in Montana George he made no mistake, for George was "a man," in the quietly emphatic language of the West.

When George made a report, Slocum knew it could be depended upon.

Now, as they were riding along, the young engineer broke out after a musing silence that had lasted for several miles.

"George, I wish I understood Sioux."

Montana George smoothed out a lock of his horse's mane, answering:

"Ay, ay, there's a many wish that."

"But very few who can do it, I suppose."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Enough, I reckon."

"Why enough?"

"For all the darned Jingo's worth, I mean, Mr. Slocum."

"Worth?"

"Yes, worth. They're a bad lot, and it won't be many years before they're all gone."

"But there are white men who can speak their tongue; are there not?"

"Ay, ay, as many as are wanted."

"Can you speak it, Rockwell?"

Montana George nodded.

"A little. Not enough to interpret, though, if that's what you want."

Slocum looked at him curiously.

"What I want? What makes you think I want anything?"

Rockwell smiled.

"That's easy enough to see. You want to do something, and you're afraid to let anybody know what it is."

"You're right, George, I do."

"I knowed it."

"But I'll tell you, George, if you'll keep it still between us two."

Rockwell nodded.

"Go ahead, sir, I won't tell any one. We don't belong to the army, so we can afford to keep secrets to ourselves."

"George," said the young man, drawing closer to the scout and speaking low, though they were at least a quarter of a mile ahead of the column, "I have got something to say to you. I've something on my mind, ever since the fight when Mr. Graves was killed by the Indians."

"I thought as much."

"Yes. You were in the fight, were you not, George?"

"I think I was," George dryly replied. "At least that was my impression."

"Where were you?"

"With the scouts."

"And they didn't join the line?"

Montana George smiled.

"I reckon not."

"Why not?"

"Knowed better," said the scout in the dryest of tones. "Don't suppose we'd fight Injuns in the open, while there was plenty of cover round us."

"I don't quite understand you. I'm not an Indian-fighter, you know."

Rockwell nodded kindly, for he was one of those men who never make fun of the green-horns. He answered quietly:

"Of course not, but you're a darned good man for all that, Mr. Slocum. I seen ye in the fight, when ye didn't think it. I'll tell ye how it is. These Injuns are men, jest the same as the rest of us, and they don't want to get killed any more than we do. They're not like soldiers, who do as they're ordered, and get killed like fools, because an officer tells them to go into a bad place. They're like us scouts and plainmen, every man for himself, and they don't see no glory in getting-killed. Neither do I."

"I see that. Go on."

"Well, naturally, when they're ten to one, they'll fight like blazes; and, being as they're all born a-horseback, as one might say, they'll charge over a green plain like a pack of hounds after a rabbit. But that's all."

"Well?"

"Well, you've seen a hound after rabbits that come on a bear of a sudden, haven't you, Mr. Slocum?"

"Can't say I have, but I can imagine it."

"Exactly. He'd turn and put like blue lightning, wouldn't he?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, and that's just what an Injun charge comes to, if it meets a few good men in the edge of a wood, and we all know it. I've seen three men in a wood keep a hundred Injuns at bay. They'd howl like hounds and go ramping about, but they wouldn't come up to the scratch, where some one was bound to be killed. Every one of 'em thought he was going to be the one that was to be fetched out of his boots."

"And that's why you took to the woods in the fight?"

"Sart'ly. As soon as we saw that the soldiers were into it hot, we scouts lit out to the flank, where there was a nice lot of timber, covered in on all sides, and we just held that place till the whole scrimmage was over. I had a glass with me, that I borrowed of one of the other scouts, and we watched the whole affair."

"Then you must have seen Mr. Graves."

Montana George nodded mournfully.

"Ay, ay, he was a good man, that—a very good man indeed."

"Did you see him killed?"

"Yes."

"Describe it as near as you can for me. I have my reason for asking."

Montana George thought for a little, and began slowly:

"As nigh as I can recollect, in the first fight, Mr. Graves never lifted a hand. We could see him through the glass, sitting on the ground, writing away in a book—"

"That book!" interrupted Slocum. "It is a very valuable one, George. Think well; do you think he had it with him when he was killed?"

George shook his head.

"Couldn't say. The last I seen of it was when you came to speak to him, and I saw him put it in his pocket. Jest after that the Injuns came down the valley kiting, with the walk-a-heaps after them."

"The what?"

"The foot soldiers, I mean. That's what the Injuns call 'em, and we get into the same way ourselves. Then I seen you was all going to get ridden over; for the Injuns was trying to get out, and you jest remember: if you corner an Injun, he'll fight like a streak, though he'll run like a hare if you give him a hole to get out of."

"And you in the woods? What did you?"

"Oh, we was in no danger. There was room to git by us, and we knew they'd take it. But the cavalrymen was right in the way. We seen the Injuns make their charge, and seen them divide and sweep round the soldiers. I seen you git up from behind a horse and run for the command, and then I seen the Injuns all 'round ye. It wasn't five minutes afore the hull thing was over, as far as I could see."

"But Graves! What of him?"

"I'm coming to that," said the scout, slowly.

"It must have been nigh five minutes, when the devils broke and scooted off; and, as they passed us I seen they had Mr. Graves a prisoner between two of 'em. They'd run him through the shoulder with a lance, and was carrying him along like a stuck pig, and the screams of him was awful to listen to—"

Slocum turned on him a face of horror.

"My God! you don't mean he was alive?"

The plainsman nodded gloomily.

"Ay, ay, you don't know Injuns yet. That was the best part of the hull thing to them, to hear him screech. As they passed, two of us picked the Injuns was carrying him, and downed 'em. He fell too, but lay there, and we saw 'em trying to pick him up. We made things hot, I tell you, and they couldn't git the body, no further."

"Yes, and then?"

"And then, when they found they couldn't carry him off, they began to circle past us, and fire into him as he lay."

Slocum shuddered.

"Poor fellow!"

George nodded.

"You may well say, pore feller! I tell you, Mr. Slocum, when a man's wounded bad, he gets all broke up anyhow, and if he gets hit again and again, there ain't a worse death to die. The cruel devils kept on firing at him, and he lying not fifty rods from us, and every shot fetched a screech. He must have been a good ten minutes dying."

"Poor fellow! And then? Did they get his body away after all?"

Montana George nodded.

"Ay, ay, we couldn't hinder 'em, for they was set on it, and we had all we could do to take care of ourselves. I can't tell ye how they did it, for the dust hid part of it, but by the time the infantry come up and they put up the valley, it was all over. We found his body stripped, and all cut to pieces as might be."

"His clothes gone?" interrupted Slocum.

"Oh, yes; might ba' knowed that. Injuns takes every rag they kin get, of our clothes."

"Then they must have the field-book that was in his pocket. Tell me, George, do you think they would be likely to destroy it?"

Montana George shook his head.

"Think not. Make medicine of it, more likely, I should say."

"Make what?"

"Medicine—witchcraft. Injuns make medicine out of everything they don't understand. Some chief's sure to take the book and put it in his medicine-bag."

"And don't you think a man might get it back?" asked Slocum, quietly.

Rockwell looked at him earnestly.

"A man might; but he'd have to be a very good man, Mr. Slocum."

"I am going to do it myself, George."

Montana George looked at the young man, hardly more than a boy in years, and answered him slowly:

"I am afraid you can't do it, Mr. Slocum."

"Why not? Tell me all the difficulties in the way, George, every one of them. I've made up my mind to go and try, but I don't want to make mistakes."

Montana George nodded.

"That's right, that's right; but you don't know what you're a-talkin' of, Mr. Slocum. You ain't been out only this trip and you don't know much about Injuns."

"Suppose I were to tell you, George, that I was brought up among Indians, what would you say?"

George stared and laughed.

"I should say you was coddin' me."
 "Well, I'm not. I was born in Western New York, within two miles of an Indian reservation, and I have an uncle who was adopted into the tribe of the Mohawks as a boy, and who taught me the language."

Montana George scratched his head.
 "Mohawks, they ain't Injuns, are they?"
 "Certainly they are; did you never hear of them? They used to be a great tribe, once."

Montana looked dubious.
 "Maybe they was, but that ain't nothin' here. I've heard of most of 'em, but I never heard of a Mohawk Injun round these parts."

"Where were you born, George?"
 "Durned if I know," returned George, in a good-humored way. "Reckon in Illinois, but ain't sure. Used to be Illinois Injuns once. I've heard say, but that ain't no 'count now. Reckon your Mohawk Injuns won't help you much here."

"Perhaps not, George, but suppose I know the sign language?"

"Well, that's something of course, but not enough to take you among the Sioux, to get a chief's medicine-bag."

"I'm aware of that, George. What I want to do is to get hold of a man who can talk Sioux, and who understands the people, to go with me. Do you know such a man?"

Montana nodded.

"Yes, I know him, but you can't get him."

"Why not?"
 "Because I reckon you haven't money enough to pay him," was the dry reply. "Bat Richards ain't the kind of a man to take his life in his hand for nothing."

"And who is Bat Richards?"

"A Canuck—John Baptist Richards."

"French Canadian?"

"Reckon so. There used to be a lot of them Frenchmen round here, in the days of the old fur company, so I've heard my dad say. Used to run bateaux up and down the river. Bat's quite an old feller."

"And you say he talks Sioux?"

"Ought to. He lived among 'em nigh ten years afore the war, and was with 'em in the Minnesota massacres. It was after that he got over to our side, and the Government pardoned him."

"For what?"

Montana George gave him a queer look.

"For what? Well, Mr. Slocum, me and you was both kids then, I reckon; but they do say as the squaw-men was the worst of all in the massacre."

"And what's a squaw-man?"

"A man that lives with Injuns and takes squaws to wife. Mostly they're a bad lot, but Baptist ain't as bad as some, I reckon. Anyhow he got pardoned and made the interpreter for the Government, till the Sioux left Minnesota for good. Now he lives at Gladstone."

Gladstone was the name of the town from which they had started; the terminus of the road as far as laid.

"Do you think it would be possible to hire this Baptist for guide and interpreter?" the young engineer asked.

Montana George looked doubtful.

"If the company paid him and took care of his family, he might come, but you couldn't touch him alone."

"Well, that's what I mean, George. All I want you to do is to come with me and see this Baptist. If he and you will go with me, I'm willing to take the risk."

Montana looked at him in his keen and scrutinizing way.

"I suppose your life is worth as much to you as any other man. If Baptist agrees to go with ye, so'll I, but you can't get him, I reckon."

"Why not?"

"He's gettin' too old to face the winter, and I tell you, Mr. Slocum, we're going to have a rip-snorting old winter."

"At least we can try, George."

And nothing more was said till they got to Gladstone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SQUAW-MAN.

THE town of Gladstone, ten years ago, was a collection of frame shanties, sod huts, wall tents and all sorts of temporary erections, clustered around some big frame store-houses which were painted yellow and surmounted by the national flag.

The store-houses belonged to the Quartermaster's Department and Indian Bureau, and were the nucleus around which the town had organized itself.

Uncle Sam sent to Gladstone, every month, enough beef, pork and flour, with all the etceteras of commissary stores, including unlimited whisky, to supply the posts on the Missouri for several hundred miles, and nearly a dozen Indian reservations and agencies.

Gladstone was the distributing point for these stores, which were protected by a fort on the opposite side of the river; and it was from Gladstone that the wagon-trains and steamboats went out to carry the stores, giving wages to a small army of teamsters, packers and other employees of the departments and the bureau for the service.

employees of the departments and the bureau for the service.

Gladstone was therefore a thriving and growing place, with nearly a thousand regular inhabitants, of whom fifty-seven kept gin-mills.

Five poker parlors flourished on and after every pay-day, and one faro table to every five gin-mills represented the gambling element of the frontier in its most attractive light.

Out in the suburbs of Gladstone, the broad plains stretched, without a tree, for miles and miles, till the flat was broken by a few prairie farms, surrounded with barbed wire fences, the nearest about half a mile off.

Going down the bank of the river, however, one soon came to a little hollow, where there had at one time been a break in the bluffs, making a deep bay or indentation.

Some trifling cause, like the lodging of a floating tree in former times, had started the river into forming a new channel, and it had cut another place at the opposite bank, which still existed.

The abandoned turn speedily filled up with alluvial soil, and had in course of time become higher than the stream, although lower than the bluffs which line the Missouri river.

In this little hollow, which was full of timber, like all river bottoms in the West, the people of Gladstone often saw a blue curl of smoke in the daytime, and it was a matter of remark that "some feller lived there" though no one troubled himself much about the hermit, who never came to town and was very rarely seen outside the hollow.

When he was visible, he appeared to be a dark, Indian-looking man, dressed in the tattered of the mountain-men of thirty years before, and carrying an old-fashioned, flint-lock rifle.

One or two townsmen had visited his dwelling and found it to be an Indian teepee or wigwam, which disgusted them so that they went no further, for, of all the things an average frontiersman hates, it is an Indian; and a man who lives in Indian style ranks even below a full-blooded savage in their estimation.

Nevertheless it was to this little hollow, known to the Gladstonians as "Squaw-man's Hole" that Seth Slocum and Montana George took their way about three days after their safe arrival at the town of Gladstone.

They rode over the level plain in the soft light of a September afternoon, and when they arrived at "Squaw-man's Hole" George took the lead, Slocum following. They found the little hollow, which only measured about three hundred yards across, densely filled with timber and underwood, with no path visible.

The leaves were just beginning to turn and presented a pretty picture of brightly glowing colors, but at first there was no token of human habitation in the hollow of the bank.

Montana George, however, took the lead and plunged down through the brushwood, till he came to the black bottom, which was so near a swamp that the horses sunk up to the crown of the hoof in the soft soil.

Slocum followed him blindly, and after a great deal of thrashing about in the bushes, they emerged on an open space of about an acre and a half, planted with Indian corn and surrounded by trees, through which, on one side, the white gleam of the river showed.

On this side, hidden from view, alike from the bank above and from passing boats on the stream, stood an Indian teepee, covered with buffalo-hides, which had been tanned white and painted with all sorts of strange hieroglyphics.

In front of this teepee sat two Indian women, one suckling a baby, the other skinning a dead coyote or prairie wolf, while through an opened flap of a doorway Slocum could see the form of a man crouched over a fire on the ground, from which the smoke ascended to the top of the teepee and passed out.

"That's the old man," said George in a low tone to Slocum. "Get off your horse and we'll see what he's got to say."

The two women in front of the tent never looked up at their approach, though Slocum saw that they were fully aware of his presence, for they kept muttering to each other as they went on with their occupations.

He and George dismounted from their horses and tied them to trees, then went forward to the entrance of the teepee, when George called out:

"Hallo, Bat! That you?"

There was no change in the attitude of the crouching figure inside the hut, but Slocum heard a grunt like that of a pig, and Montana George, without further ceremony, walked into the teepee and gave the croucher a ringing slap on the back.

"Hallo, Bat!" he repeated. "What ye doin' here, old man? Why don't ye say how do?"

The man at the fire slowly turned toward George a dark, forbidding face, with a thin fringe of scanty black beard round his mouth, and a pair of keen, glittering eyes set close together.

It was a broad face, with high cheek-bones and bushy black hair falling over the forehead, while the lips parted to show a row of very white teeth in an ugly grin.

"Vat you vant?" he asked, with a strong foreign accent.

"What do we want?"

Montana George laughed at the question, and said to Slocum:

"Sit down. I'll manage the old cuss."

There was not much chance to sit down on anything but the ground in the teepee, but Montana George went to one side, where a pile of furs were laid, yanked out a buffalo-robe and said to Slocum:

"Sit down, sir, sit down. Baptist's a darned hog; always was; but we'll bring him to his milk."

Then he coolly seated himself beside his companion on the skin and continued:

"Now, Bat Richards, I want to talk to you."

The other man had been squatting on his heels over the fire in the usual Indian attitude of reflection, and he did not deign to turn his head.

"I want to talk to you," repeated George in a louder tone, "and I want you to attend to me. Do you hear that?"

Bat Richards grunted.

"This is the matter," said George continuing.

"This gentleman wants to pay a visit to the Sioux tribes at once."

Bat slowly turned his head till his glowing eyes rested on Slocum, whom he surveyed from head to foot.

A grunt was his only comment on the news he had received, and Slocum felt that he could hardly have experienced a keener or a more contemptuous one.

Montana George went on as calmly as before to the uncivil man:

"You can grunt all you please; but what we want to know's this, what'll you take to go along as interpreter and take us to Sitting Bull's camp?"

Bat Richards slowly rose to his feet, went to the side of the teepee and pulled out another robe, on which he seated himself cross-legged before he answered. Then he turned on them a face no longer stolid and forbidding, but full of keenness, as he asked quietly:

"How much you give?"

Slocum was about to speak, when Montana George pulled his skirt.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

Bat shook his head.

"How much you give? Want a heap?"

Montana nodded.

"I know that, you old sinner; but I ain't cheapening any man's goods. I don't know whether you can take us there at all."

Bat tossed his head scornfully.

"I take you dere, sure; you pay."

"Ay, ay, I can do that myself," answered George dryly. "We've been there already and seen all we want to. What I'm after is this: can you take us there safely without any fighting, and bring us back?"

Slocum looked at the Frenchman in great anxiety.

Bat Richards appeared to be considering over his answer, for it was nearly a minute before he said:

"I do it. How much you give?"

Montana answered indifferently:

"Well, it's worth 'bout a hundred dollars and a new rig and horse."

Bat Richards looked at him from head to foot and spat in the fire.

"No good," he said sententiously.

Montana George shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, then, what do you want?"

Bat looked him in the eye.

"Want thousand dollar, t'ree boss, for self and squaws, wagon and oxen. Must have 'em. Tired of Gladstone. Can't move."

Slocum was again about to speak, when Montana checked him a second time.

"Too much," he said. "We may as well go home, and you kin stay here and starve all the winter. How?"

With that he signaled Slocum to rise, and the two comrades were going to leave the teepee when Bat said in rude French:

"Tiens—pas si vite. Vat you gif?"

"I've told you," returned George pausing.

"A hundred dollars and a horse and rig. That's all."

"But vat become of my wife?" asked the Frenchman, with more animation than he had hitherto shown. "See, Monsieur Shorge, I must take care my families."

Montana looked at the two women in a doubtful way asking:

"What tribe are they?"

"Sioux," was the eager reply. "Great chief's daughter, dat one with baby. Sitting Bull himself, fader."

Montana smiled scornfully.

"Oh, tell that to the greenhorns. Well, I'll tell you what we'll do. They shall have rations while we're gone."

"Who gif de ration?" asked Bat sharply.

"The railroad company," was the reply.

Bat shook his head.

"Don't know de company. Know de quartermaster."

"You will know the company though," the plainsman retorted. "We don't go to no quartermaster's, when we want anything. You

shall have your rations delivered here by the bank, so no one won't be able to cheat you. How many people?"

"Five," said Bat cunningly, "coffee and sugar for five. Half five bimeby. Ugh! No like stay here. No like it. Gif wagon; we all go to Sitting Bull's camp."

"We don't do any such thing," retorted the scout coolly. "Your wives and baby stay here, and don't stir a step. Now then, will you go or not?"

"Vat you vant me to go for?" asked Bat evasively. "I vant know. Is it soldat? You vant fight? No, no, I no go."

"No, it ain't soldiering nor fighting neither," said George promptly. "It's just to take this gentleman and me to the camp."

"Vat you vant dere?"

"That's none of your biz. We want to see Sitting Bull and give him a present."

Bat chuckled.

"You gif him me. I take him dere."

"Thank you for nothing. This gentleman wants to study Injun life; take pictures; buy curiosities; trade."

Bat shook his head.

"Dey no let him go. You know dat. No man allowed trade vid hostile. You know dat, Monsieur Shorge. Vy you make fool of me?"

George could not help a laugh as he said to Slocum, aside:

"Sharp old cuss, ain't he? He knows that it's against the law to trade, except at the agencies, with a permit."

Aloud to Bat he said:

"That's our business. We take the risk of that on ourselves. Maybe we'll get a permit, maybe not, but that's nothing to you."

"Noting to me?" echoed Bat. "All right, den, you find de way you self. I no go."

And he seated himself again at the fire and looked at the smoke.

CHAPTER VII.

HARD BARGAINING.

SLOCUM began to feel discouraged, and whispered to Montana:

"Why not tell him what we want?"

Montana George shook his head.

"Leave him to me. The old cuss is keen to go; but he's drivin' a hard bargain."

"But why not tell him what we want?"

"Because, if we do, he'll sell us out as sure as fate. We've got to lie like thunder. You don't suppose they'd give us the book, if they thought it was worth money? No, sir. We've got to steal that book somehow."

This conversation passed in a whisper, to which Bat listened with all his ears, while appearing most stolid.

Then Montana George resumed.

"Come, Bat, I tell you what we'll do with you, for good."

Bat looked at the fire without deigning to turn his head.

"We'll give you a horse and rig, new rifle and revolvers, take care of your folks for the winter, and promise you two hundred dollars, when you come back with us."

Bat turned his face toward them with all expression discharged from it.

"No good," was all he said.

Even Montana George, who knew him well, seemed to be nettled as he asked:

"Well, what is good then?"

Bat grinned triumphantly.

"Me told you. Me take five hundred dollar down, rest when come back. Me want t'ree horse and wagon to move."

"Then darn your half-breed skin, you don't get it," cried Montana in high dudgeon, and as he spoke he moved resolutely to the door.

"Come, Mr. Slocum, it's no use talking to that old tarrier. He kin go to blazes. I'll find you a man that's got some reason."

Slocum listened to what he said, but did not stir from the skin on which he had taken his seat.

He saw that Bat Richards was watching them both keenly, in spite of his apparent stolidity, and an idea came into his head.

Leaning forward toward the Frenchman, he made a peculiar sign with the forefingers of both hands.

The moment he made it the other turned his head with a quick motion and a look of great surprise, asking in French:

"What is it?"

"It is the Black Cloud," answered Slocum in the same tongue, speaking low. "Does my brother sit in the shadow?"

Bat Richards gravely bowed his head, and seemed to be trying to remember some formula of words, for he said slowly:

"Shadow and light are one to the brethren. From whence come you?"

"From the wigwam of the East, by the great water," said Slocum. "Give me the grip, that I may know if you be a true brother."

Bat Richards instantly reached over his hand and clasped that of the young surveyor, while Montana George, who at sound of the French tongue, had turned in the doorway to look at them, ejaculated under his breath:

"Well, I swear."

Then young Slocum turned to George.

"You can come and sit down," he said. "I told you I've been with Indians before. Mr. Richards is a brother, and will tell me the truth and go with me."

Indeed, the change in the demeanor of the Frenchman from that moment was so full and complete that George could hardly believe his eyes, and returned and sat down on the buffalo-rope in a stupor of amazement.

"Well," said Slocum, taking the lead now that he had effected such an easy conquest. "Are the brethren in these parts alive, brother?"

Bat nodded eagerly.

"Alive and full of work."

"Are there any in Sitting Bull's camp?"

"Yes, yes, Sitting Bull himself is the chief. What are you, brother?"

Slocum made a peculiar sign.

"Do you know that?"

Bat nodded respectfully.

He made another.

Bat shook his head with a look of awe.

"No, brother—I mean—chief—that is above me. Are you there?"

Slocum smiled.

"I am far above that. Now you will come with us to the camp; is it not so?"

Bat bowed his head respectfully.

"I am your servant; but you will deal with me justly as a brother. What do you want at the camp of Sitting Bull? I have my life to protect as well as this mad American, and he cares for nothing. To him I am only a squawman, worse than a dog. You are a brother and know me. I ask, as a brother, what wish you at the camp?"

Slocum hesitated.

The conversation took place in French, with which he was well acquainted, having been brought up among French Canadians and Indians on the reservation in New York, and Montana George sat listening, but understanding nothing, except that the young man and the half-breed belonged to some secret order, which had brought them together.

Of the existence of such an order among the Indians Montana George had heard, and he had also heard that it originally came from the Eastern Indians, who had probably established it among themselves in imitation of the white freemasonry, which first began to be prominent in history soon after the colonization of the North American colonies.

Slocum had been initiated into one of these mystic lodges, early in life, by his uncle, and had taken all the degrees possible to be taken, without any expectation of using them.

It was in a vague curiosity, as a last resort, incredulous of the result, that he had made the sign to Bat Richards; but the result had delighted and astounded him.

The order into which he had entered among the Mohawks of New York, a moribund and almost extinct tribe, was flourishing out here among the Sioux, and promised him an easy entry into their secret haunts.

But for all that, Slocum hesitated as to answering Bat's question in full.

He did not yet know how far the influence of the order extended in modifying the natural ferocity of the savage.

"I wish," he said, "to see how the Brothers of the Cloud behave out here, and whether their work is correctly performed. I am sent by the head chief of all, whose name is only spoken in the last circle."

Bat appeared to be satisfied.

"My brother shall come with me. But it is necessary to fit me out for the journey. I must have what I said before, three horses and a wagon and oxen to move my family. I wish to live among my brothers again."

Slocum nodded.

"That is well. If you wish to come with us and bring your wives, you can do so. I will see to it."

Bat laid his hand on the young man's arm, asking earnestly:

"Is that on the word of a brother?"

"It is; but I do not want you to take your wives at all."

Bat frowned fretfully.

"Why not, brother?"

"Because I am coming back here and shall want you with me. The wives must stay here, that we may travel fast."

Bat looked sullenly at the fire.

"My wives go where I go, brother. If you want wives, you can have all you need at the camp of Sitting Bull, but I must have mine with me. I cannot leave them here by the town."

"Why not?" asked Slocum with some surprise and curiosity.

Bat Richards looked uneasily out of the doorway, where the two women still sat.

The one that had been skinning the coyote was now cutting the animal into pieces and shedding them into a pot, evidently for the purpose of supper.

The half-breed shrugged his shoulders.

"You see the one cooking. Her name is Red Feather. I bought her for five ponies from the Arapahoes, and she would run away to town after some other man if I left her."

Slocum could hardly help laughing.

"In that case, it seems to me I would let her go. She can't be very fond of you, and you'll still have the other one. Who is she?"

"She is called Ripple, and is a good squaw," said Bat, gravely. "I need her to cook. Besides with women we shall travel safer."

"Why?"

Bat shrugged his shoulders.

"The Indians will see a lodge-trail and think it one of their own going into the camp. If we go without the lodge, we shall be taken for spies and be killed by the dog soldiers."

Slocum turned to Montana George, who had been perfectly silent, and told him the result of the talk with Bat.

The plainsman looked doubtful.

"I don't know much about these societies and orders," he said. "I don't belong to any myself, but I suppose it's all right. If we take the squaws and lodge we'll have to live Injun fashion, and run from our own people, but maybe it will be for the best in the end. I hain't no more to say about it myself."

His tone was constrained and Slocum saw that he was offended:

"Don't be angry, George," he began.

George shook his head.

"I ain't angry—that is, not with you, Mr. Slocum. You're anxious to get back what you've lost. But I don't trust that sneakin' Bat. He wants to git his hull family off to his Injun friends and leave us to get out best way we know how."

Slocum drew him near to whisper.

"You forget. I have a pledge from him he dare not break. He belongs to an Order."

Montana George looked obstinate.

"May be it's all right. I've heard them as was Freemasons talk the same way; but I've knowed 'em cheat each other as bad as any other kind, though I'll allow they'll stick together to cheat any one outside of their lodge."

Then to Bat the frontiersman said:

"What'n blazes do you want with a wagon and oxen? You can't take 'em over the bad lands, and you know it."

Bat curled his lip.

"If I take de wagon I go over all de bad land we find. You tink I never travel before? Ugh!"

"But you know well enough that we couldn't get anyway nigh Sitting Bull's camp with a wagon," pursued George. "The Injuns would trail us and come down on us like a pack of wolves."

Bat shrugged his shoulders.

"I tend to dat," was all the answer that he deigned.

Slocum addressed him again in French:

"My brother will tell me his plans," he said, soothingly. "In the name of the Order I ask my brother whether he can take me to Sitting Bull's camp in safety or not. That is all I require of him."

Bat Richards stretched out his hand to the young engineer, and met him with the grip of the Order.

"On the faith of a brother, I will take you in safety to the camp of Sitting Bull," he answered. "I will take you to himself, and you shall find him a brother. I can promise no more than this. If you have told me the truth, and desire no more than to examine the brothers, you shall come away as safe as you went; but I warn you, brother, that if you have any deceit in your heart against the Order you had better stay at home."

The manner of the half-breed was simple and earnest, and his language, now that he was speaking his native tongue, devoid of the jerky abruptness he used in the English speech.

Slocum was indeed so much impressed by it that he felt an involuntary tremor as he reflected that his real object in going to the Indian camp was other than that he affected, and for a moment had serious thoughts of telling all and throwing himself on the honor of his half-breed confederate.

It was with some disturbance of manner that he finally said:

"Of course I have no evil designs against any brother of the Order. I go to see if they have kept alive the sacred fire and to test their knowledge in the oracles of the Order of the Dark Cloud."

Bat Richards bowed his head.

"You will be welcome among them in that case. You will find many there far above me, and to them you will be more than welcome. It is settled. I will go with you and you shall take me and my wives to the camp."

"But the money?" objected Slocum. "I am not a rich brother, and cannot afford to pay a thousand dollars."

Bat Richards waved his hand.

"You are my brother and will pay me what you can afford."

Slocum hesitated again.

"No, no," he answered, "I do not wish to deceive you, brother. I cannot afford to pay you anything of myself. The money will come from other people."

Bat pricked up his ears.

"From what other people? The soldiers?"

"No. The soldiers do not wish me to go."

"Very good. I am glad of that."

"Why glad?"

The half-breed's eyes glowed in the dark shadow of the teepees.

"The soldiers are dogs and cowards," he said bitterly. "They lie to us and kill our women and children, when they cannot get warriors. We hate them."

"So do I," said Slocum. "I come from a company of men who believe in peace. I wish to go among my red brothers and show them that a white man can tell the truth and keep his word to them. I will pay you two hundred dollars, and provide horses for yourself and wives to go with us, but I cannot take a wagon with us. Do you accept that?"

Bat looked at him furtively.

The influence of the Order was strong over his mind, for he was ignorant and superstitious, and it is just such men that are most impressed by the oaths and ceremonies of secret societies.

But for all that, the Frenchman was a keen bargainer and did not propose to be outwitted by any one.

"Will you tell me, on the faith of a brother, that you can pay no more?" he asked.

Slocum drew a deep breath before he answered and then replied:

"I cannot provide a wagon, on the faith of a brother; and two hundred dollars will take almost all my stock of money."

Which was literally true as regarded his private means, though he knew that the railroad company stood behind him, in the person of Russell, chief engineer, to back him up in any expense necessary to recover the lost field-book, on whose possession hung a Congressional subsidy of land and money worth at least ten millions of dollars.

Bat looked more doubtful still.

"My brother can get money from some one else, from the railroad company, for instance. This mad American said that the company would give us rations."

"Certainly," said Slocum. "The company will do so if I ask for it, but they will not give me any more money than I can earn for them."

"My brother will have to beg, then," said Bat obstinately. "I am a poor man and it will be a hard journey. I must have five hundred dollars and seven horses, with new things and rations for us all."

Slocum hesitated apparently, though in reality he was delighted with the cheap consummation of the bargain.

He did not dare to appear eager, for to do so would be to give the half-breed a clew to the value he placed on his expedition.

"I will think of it," he said slowly. "It's a great deal of money, and you ought not to treat a brother thus. I'll try to get it for you. After all, what interest is it to me, save for my own curiosity? I might better give up the expedition."

Bat pretended to be conscience-stricken.

"I will go for four hundred and fifty then. I don't want to be hard on a brother. Will you give that?"

"I suppose I must," answered Slocum dryly. "I shall tell the head chief on my return how ardent the brethren are in the cause of the Order, and they will all know the name of the brother who drives bargains with the emissary of the chief."

Bat looked frightened.

"Call it four hundred then," he exclaimed, "and tell us the higher secrets of the Order! I will go for that."

Slocum saw he had touched the right chord at last.

The ignorant half-breed was as anxious to investigate the secrets of the upper circles of the Order as was ever a dry-goods drummer to wear a skull and cross-bones on his watch-guard, or to tell his friends that he had taken the thirty-second degree.

So he bowed his head, observing:

"I have authority to organize lodges of all the degrees, and if you are examined and found worthy, you too may become a member of the supreme council. I will give you three hundred dollars."

Bat reached out his hand, his face glowing with satisfaction.

"I will go," he said.

Slocum did not allow his own relief to appear, but said coldly:

"When will you be ready?"

"To-morrow—to-night, if you wish; as soon as I see the ponies to pack my goods. I have but one, and he is lame."

"You shall have them to-morrow, and we will start to-morrow night," said Slocum. "We must get out of here before the soldiers see us, or we shall be stopped."

Bat laughed.

"The soldiers are fools," he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

SLIPPING OUT.

THE full moon hung over the dark, barren plains that surrounded Fort Gladstone, opposite the town, the next night after the interview between Slocum and the squaw-man, when a large bateau, that generally lay beside the wharf at Gladstone for a ferry, got adrift from

its moorings without any one noticing it, and floated away down-stream.

At the time the accident occurred, the citizens of Gladstone were congregated at Andy Miller's "shebang" to see a dog-fight, on which much money was bet; and those who could not get into the room where the pit was set were waiting outside to hear the news, or betting on the reports as they came in.

Consequently the boat, which at first only chafed on the wharf by its moorings, when it finally got adrift, swept round in the swift current of the Missouri, and went drifting down-stream, turning round and round as it went.

It was not till it had drifted past the extremest shanties of Gladstone that it became apparent some one was on board.

Then a man, who had been lying down in the bottom of the bateau, rose cautiously up into a crouching position and peeped over the side.

As soon as he saw that he was hidden from view of the town by a projecting point of timber, he developed into a marvel of activity and strength.

Seizing from the bottom of the boat the long push-pole used by the ferryman, he put it out on the side away from the land and shoved the boat close in shore, where the current was slower than in the middle of the river, and let it drop down nearly a mile, till it arrived opposite the dark wooded hollow of "Squaw-man's Hole."

Here a light was shining, deep inside the wood, glimmering at intervals between the trees, and the man with the pole uttered a long, low cry, which was instantly answered from the shore, where the branches and dry sticks cracked and rustled under footsteps.

The boatman, with a powerful effort of mingled skill and strength, sent his boat in a moment to the shore, and called out in broken English and French:

"Hoh! Vite! Queeck! Take de line! Sa-crere nous! take eet—take eet! You cink I von elephant?"

A couple of dark figures leaped on the boat and picked up the lines on board, which had been cleverly cast off at the time she appeared to be breaking from her moorings at the Gladstone wharf.

They leaped ashore with them, and had them fast to trees before the force of the current could break the boat loose, which it threatened to do every moment.

Then the man with the pole let it fall into the bottom of the boat, crying:

"Ouf! que c'est lourd!—dat is heavee, ven man not use to heem. I have not pole boat for ten year. Ouf!"

"Well, she's here anyhow," replied the voice of Montana George. "Now git yer traps on, and all the cattle ye have."

The half-breed stepped on shore, while Slocum and George, who were the men who had been waiting for him, secured the boat firmly.

"He got the bateau off very well, I must admit," said George, rather grudgingly.

Slocum laughed at his tone.

"Of course he did. I see you don't like to trust him, but you'll see he'll not play us false."

Montana George grunted.

"Umph! No, I don't like to trust him. He's jest half an Injun anyway, and they're always the worst. I don't intend to do much trusting for my part, to anything but my rifle and revolvers. But I suppose you know best. I don't expect never to come back alive, so I don't care much."

"Then why do you go with me at all?" the young man asked. "I'm not afraid to go alone."

Montana George uttered another grunt, this time of angry incredulity.

"What d'ye take me for? A milk-and-water babby that's afraid to follow a man? No, sir! If you go, I go; if you lose your hair, I lose mine. The company pays me to go with you, and agrees to take care of my old mother if I get wiped out—and I'm going through. Here comes Bat, and all his baggages and baggage."

The cracking and rustling in the bushes were renewed, and, one after another, nearly a dozen little Indian ponies came out of the thicket, in single file, each carrying a pack on its back, and tied head to tail.

The first pony was led by Bat, and bore on its back a muffled figure, riding astride, while the last two dragged long sticks, trailing on the ground behind them, and were conducted by the squaw, Red Feather, who seemed to be in a sulky humor, for she was growling to herself all the way.

"That's the woman who's going to give us trouble," remarked Montana George in a low tone. "You mark my words—she's a 'Rapa-hoe, and they're p'ison mean."

"What's the matter with her, do you think?" the young engineer asked.

Montana shrugged his shoulders.

"I won't tell you, I swear. P'raps she's got a feller in the town, and wants to go to him, or else don't fancy going out on the plains with winter coming on. Hard to say why she's sulky, but sulky she is, you can bet your bottom dollar."

The half-breed here led the horses on board the bateau, one by one, finally getting them all in a bunch at one end, tilting the other up in the air, when he called out angrily to Red Feather some Indian words, which caused that redoubtable cock to bestir herself and get them straightened out and the bateau on an even bottom again, for keel she had none.

"Eh bien?—vat you say? Here ve vas," cried Bat. "Now, messieurs, take de poles and do vat you vas told. Ve cross queeck."

There were four poles lying in the boat, and all were very long, with broad, rounded ends, made of thick plank, fastened on to prevent them sinking in the black mud at the bottom of the Missouri.

The old *voyageur*—for it was easy to see that Baptist was used to bateaux—took his position at the stern, the lines were cast off, and away went the loaded boat down the raging current, at the rate of seven or eight miles an hour.

Now out came the poles, and under the direction of Bat, they began to shove the boat over toward the other shore.

Rapid as was the current, it was so shallow that they could feel the bottom all the time, and all they had to do was to shove in their poles, let the current swing them round, and so cross the river in a diagonal direction, going down-stream.

To push the boat upward, be it ever so little, against such a current, would have required the strength of a score of men.

Slocum noted but little where they were going, in his own struggle to hold on to the pole, for it seemed to him very often as if the current and heavy boat to gether would tear it out of his hands, or drag him overboard with it, but at last he heard Bat cry out:

"Arretez! Stop! Now, all togeder! Vite! Houp-la!"

With that, all three poles were dug in together, and with a grand shove, the boat suddenly struck an eddy, for which the wary Frenchman had been looking, which sent it whirling round and round like a top, but stopped its downward progress at once and sent it across stream.

Then Slocum looked up and saw that they were close under the other bank, before a bend in the river, while Bat and George were holding their poles poised ready to shove when the eddy carried them into a proper position.

A moment later Bat said:

"Allons! Push vonce more—now!"

With that came another united shove, and the boat skimmed into the bay and grated on the pebbles, while the *voyageur* braced himself to hold it there with all his skill, calling out in low, guarded tones:

"Ashore! Queeck, queeck! De line! Pestef! I am not strong enough to hold him for evaire. De line, de line!"

Montana George leaped ashore with the end of the line first, and had it round the trunk of a sapling, just as the current drove the boat away so hard that the Frenchman lost his hold of the pole and was almost pulled overboard.

Away went the bateau for nearly twenty feet, when it was checked by the line, and then the force of the current bent over the stout sapling even with the ground.

For several seconds it was a question if the line would not tear out the sapling; but luckily it was a very tough one and held long enough for Slocum to jump out with another line and get it round a tree a foot thick, when the united efforts of all hands dragged it close to the bank and it rested stationary.

Then Montana George said in a low tone:

"Keep still, all of ye, and keep the ponies quiet too. We're nearer the fort than I like to be, and we don't want to be spotted by nobody."

He disappeared in the bushes that fringed the bank, and climbed up in silence to the top.

The river was low at that time of year, and the bluffs on the side towered up a good hundred feet from the surface of the water, though a few weeks later would probably see the current flush with the prairie above, and overflowing it in many places.

Down by the bank, the half-breed and Red Feather led the loaded ponies very carefully over the side of the bateau, and got them on the ground as silently as they could; the favored squaw, Ripple, sitting quietly on her own pony, with the baby in her arms in its covering of bark, her care being to keep it from crying.

Indian mothers never allow their babies to cry from the time of their birth; and the process they adopt is one which can be recommended to civilized mothers as effective if not very humane.

Slocum noticed as he got to the shore that the little thing was restless and whimpering in a low tone, and at last it burst into a wail.

In a moment the mother, who had been, up to that, soothing the poor little thing, covered its mouth with the palm of one hand and seized its nose with the forefinger and thumb of the other, effectually preventing the escape of the least particle of sound.

To be sure it choked the baby, which struggled with all its feeble force to get rid of the

pressure, and nearly died in the struggle; but as soon as it dropped its little hands from weakness, the mother removed the constraint, and the lesson had been so severe that the poor baby found it best to keep quiet and to confine its uneasiness to low whimpers and much wriggling of body.

In the position in which they were, trying to slip out past a fortified post, guarded by sentries, with a baby in the party, the young surveyor could not but admire the simple means taken by the mother to secure silence, and no longer wondered that she was allowed to ride, while Red Feather did all the work.

It was a matter of necessity to silence the baby, and there was only one alternative besides leaving it behind, which was to make it one person's work to mind it.

Bat Richards, while they were waiting for the return of Montana George, kept near the child, petting and fondling it, evidently exceedingly affectionate and proud, both of baby and mother, while Red Feather held sulkily aloof, attending to the horses, jealous of her rival, but not daring to make open objection.

At last came a rustle in the bushes, and Montana George stole out with his finger on his lips, whispering:

"You must keep stiller, or we'll be found out sure. I heard the kid squall just now, and we're not a quarter of a mile below the fort."

Bat Richards waved both hands in a fashion to signify contempt.

"Vat mattaire! Day are soldat and no hear noting. It is time ve move, if you do not see any von coming."

"No, there's no one coming, and there's a prairie crack 'bout fifty rod below here, as we can move out by," returned Montana George. "Time to turn the boat adrift, if we're to cover our trail."

They proceeded to where the boat still lay, fastened to two saplings, and began to hack at the loops of rope which were passed round the trees, till they parted, and the boat went swinging away down the current, whirling round in the eddies on her way to New Orleans.

Then they started up the bank.

CHAPTER IX.

RUNNING THE GUARD.

ARRIVED at the top of the bank, before them stretched a bare plain, flat as a table to all appearance, with little or no tokens of herbage, the season being dry.

About a quarter of a mile off to the right, up the stream, was a group of houses and a stockade, which showed the position of Fort Gladstone, and extreme caution was necessary to pass it without being seen in the bright moonlight.

To Slocum indeed, who, with all his ability and Eastern education, was as yet but a child in matters of prairie-craft, the task seemed hopeless; as they clustered under the shade of some trees that grew at the edge of the bank.

The plain lay there in the moonlight without so much as a bush for cover and they had eleven ponies in the party, with five people and a baby in arms.

While he was hesitating over the prospect, Montana George called his attention to a dark streak in the prairie, that ran off to the left front vanishing in the distance, but not appearing to end in the plain.

"There's a canyon," he said, in a low tone. "Reckon it runs out several mile. We got to git there, one by one."

The party remained in the shelter of the trees as long as was possible, and skirted the riverbed till opposite this dark line, when Bat Richards took his pony, threw himself over its side, hanging by one arm and leg in the Indian fashion, and rode boldly out at a walk toward the dark ravine that spanned the plain.

He had not gone twenty steps in the light of the moon when his identity disappeared and one might have fancied it only a stray horse moving to the ravine for a change of grass.

Montana George watched the fort closely during the passage, and drew a long sigh of relief, as he observed:

"The sentry ain't looking this way, or he'd have hollered. Go ahead, Ripple."

Ripple, with the baby, followed suit in a less hazardous fashion, but lying as close to her horse as she could go and moving slowly, the animal picking at the grass as it went.

Ripple got safely into the canyon, and Red Feather followed in a similar style with three ponies abreast, all without notice from the fort.

"That's enough," observed Montana George to Slocum. "Them Injuns can take care of themselves, baby and all. It won't do to take it for granted that sentry's never going to look this way. We'll wait a bit."

Five of the ponies had gone and of the six that remained two carried Slocum and his friend; three their things; and the other was the lodge-bearer of Bat Richards.

They were all beginning to snuff eagerly after their companions, threatening to neigh.

"Get to that one's head and hold his nose,"

whispered Montana George, and he set the example by firmly compressing the nostrils of one pony in the same way as the squaw had done with the baby, and with similar success.

"They're cunning brutes, these ponies," he observed presently, when they were quiet. "The Injuns teach 'em to keep still and I reckon they know the reason. Now go it, you old rascal."

As he spoke he dismissed the pony with a slap, and the animal went off at a trot to the edge of the track, paused a moment to look into its dark recesses, and then disappeared.

"He'll follow his mates," said George.

They watched the fort, and Slocum took out his field-glass, a very powerful instrument, and scanned the buildings in the light of the moon.

He saw the houses and a white palisade, and caught the gleam of a bayonet, carried by a soldier on the end of his rifle.

He told Montana George, and they both watched for some time to see if the man would move.

"Maybe he is watching us," whispered Slocum. "I can see him standing there, and he seems to be looking this way."

"Keep still then," whispered back the scout. "He saw the last boss, and he's waiting to see if any more come."

Slocum kept his eye to the glass, and at last saw the man move slowly off, frequently turning to look back.

He told Montana George, whose only reply was:

"Keep your eyes skinned there, and don't talk. A little goes a long way on a still night. I see him too."

They held on to the remaining pack-ponies, which were becoming very restless, wanting to follow their companions.

For nearly five minutes more the distant sentry paced up and down, frequently pausing to look their way, and at last he seemed to come to the conclusion that it had been a false alarm, for he turned his back and stood still.

Slocum was about to let another pack-pony go, when he caught sight in the glass of several moving figures coming toward the sentry, and Montana George hurriedly whispered:

"Lay low. There comes the relief. If he suspects anything, some of 'em will come this way. If not, we're all right. Listen sharp!"

They listened attentively and heard the low murmur of voices as the sentry exchanged orders with the new-comers.

Then came the clinking of arms and brass buckles as the relief moved away, while the new sentry commenced his walk with the briskness of a man who is under his corporal's eye, and Montana whispered:

"It's all right. We'll move as soon as his back's well turned."

In fact, after a few turns, they saw the sentry go into a box provided for the purpose, from which he did not emerge for so long that Montana said:

"He's goin' to sleep. Let the broncho go."

Slocum released the uneasy pony, and the little creature started off at a trot, dashed into the canyon, and they could hear it trotting and neighing all the way down the ravine, answered from far away in the advance by the others.

George uttered a vicious curse as he listened, muttering:

"The pesky brute 'll give the alarm, sure as fate, and we'll have to run for it. Git on yer hoss, Mr. Slocum, or we gits turned back sure."

But Slocum, who was watching through the glass, saw no movement in the sentry box, and retorted:

"Don't get flurried, man. The sound comes to us up the ravine, but it don't go to the fort that way. Hark! it's stopped."

The neighing had indeed subsided to a dead silence, and still there was not a sign of motion in the fort.

After waiting five minutes more, Slocum threw himself down on his horse's neck and started for the crack, followed by the pack-ponies.

Whether he was seen or not he could not tell, but he saw no motion in the fort and was soon sheltered in the ravine, which he found to be a crack in the earth formed by the accumulated cracks of thousands of years, where the winter's rains had washed away the soft strata of the soil and formed a torrent-bed, dry for half the year.

It descended from the level of the prairie, quite regularly, with a smooth bottom of sand about two feet wide, and rugged, nearly perpendicular sides, while the hard-beaten state of the sand showed that it had been used as a road by wild animals of all sorts for a long time.

As soon as Slocum was fairly hidden from view, he made his horse trot out, and before long caught sight of the dark figures of his Indian friends ahead.

Before he had time to come up with them he heard horses' feet behind him, and saw Montana George coming up.

"Well?" he asked, as the scout rode to his side. "Were you seen?"

"Reckon not," said George hurriedly, "but for all that we want to put, the best we know

how, for they're sure to hunt up this barranca in the morning, and if they find our trail it won't need no Injun to read it."

"But why should they follow us?"

"To keep us from going out to the Sioux, of course."

"But it's no business of theirs."

"Maybe it ain't, but they make it so, if so be they get a chance. They'll take us fur Injun traders."

"That's just what I want every one to do, George. It's our only chance to get into the camp safely, you say."

Montana George nodded.

"Ay, ay; that's all true enough; but you don't remember what it is that Injuns wants in trade."

"I know what we've got, what Bat told me was necessary."

"Ay, ay, it's Bat this, and Bat that," said the scout ill-temperedly. "I ain't saying he ain't giving you good advice, mind you, but you must remember that what's good fur a Injun's bad fur a white man. I ain't no lover of sojers, but I must say if I was a sojer I'd hate a Injun-trader worse than a Injun."

"Why?"

George gave a short laugh.

"Why? Well, I swear I thought you knew. What have you got in the packs of the three ponies we own in this outfit?"

"Tobacco, and brass cartridges for Winchester rifles," replied Slocum innocently. "What of that? I suppose they need the cartridges for hunting; don't they?"

Montana George snorted.

"Ay, ay, for hunting. They need 'em bad, and they'll be darned glad to see us, you bet; but you can bet too that the sojers wouldn't like it over much if they knew we was going out with sich a cargo."

"Of course I know all that," returned the young engineer calmly, "but just now all I'm thinking of is how to recover that field-book. If I get that back, and the company get the appropriation, we can afford to let the soldiers growl. They owe us more than we owe them."

"How's that?"

"All they do for us is to protect our advance surveys; but where we go, the Indian has to leave the country, and one railroad will do more to open the West than all the lazy soldiers that ever lounged round a fort."

Slocum spoke warmly; for he was a plain, hardworking man, and had noticed, since his trip out West, what a useless set as a class army men were.

Montana George seemed to be satisfied with his sentiments, for he replied:

"By gosh, that's about so; but for all that the sojers thinks they does a heap fur the country, and I will say that they bring a lot of grub and money round."

They dropped the conversation right there, for they began to see ahead of them that the ravine, barranca or canyon, as it might be variously called, had ended abruptly in a wall, and that the Indians had turned round a corner and disappeared.

Trotting up to the place they found that the side ravine had merged into a larger one, from which branched off at intervals, like the limbs of a tree, side ravines and torrent-beds.

To Slocum, who had seen these mazes of ravines before, the problem of threading them without a mistake had always seemed a difficult one, but Bat Richards went on without the slightest hesitation, and before an hour had passed led them out on the level plain again, a good six miles from Fort Gladstone in a straight line; but, as Montana George observed:

"Nigher thirty the way they'll have to go, unless they follow our trail dead, and I don't believe they'll do that. I tell ye, Mr. Slocum, this Bat Richards is a darned good guide, if he is a half-breed. He'll keep us hid, if man can, till we git to Sitting Bull's camp. After that look out."

Slocum laughed at his warning tone.

"I'll trust him yet, George. You can't deny that he has done well so far."

"It's his biz," grumbled George, "but we ain't crossed the last line yet, and there's scoutin' parties out. We may run on one of 'em and get sent back yet."

"I'll risk that," replied Slocum. "I'm going to make a spoon or spoil a horn this time, George, and don't you forget it."

CHAPTER X.

THE SCOUTING-PARTY.

WHEN the little party emerged on the open plain the moon was within an hour of its setting, but they could see a long way ahead.

Bat Richards waited till his friends came up and said, pointing to a dark spot far ahead on the plain.

"Ve stay dere to-morrow, and march at night only, till we get out of dis. Ve hef to go fast. Houp-la!"

With that he laid the whip on his pack-horses, and away went the whole string, at the rapid amble of the Indian pony on a journey, keeping it up, hour after hour, till the dark spot revealed itself to be a clump of wood, standing island-like on the prairie, and promising a shelter from

the night wind, which had begun to come up, cold and cutting.

The moon had set and the faint gray streaks of early dawn were beginning to lighten the eastern sky before they reached the wood, and Rockwell observed with much satisfaction:

"That's nigh on two days' march for the sojers from the fort if they follow, but I don't believe they will. They'll trust to the scouting-parties. I'm more afeared of them than being trailed."

The wood turned out to be clustered at the entrance of another system of ravines, most of which were fed by small streams and densely wooded.

Bat Richards led them down one and up another, the light of dawn getting stronger and redder all the while, till he finally came to a halt by a little pool, surrounded with deep grass and a heavy thicket of trees.

Here he got off his pony, saying:

"Ve stay here all day. No fires."

He condescended to unsaddle his own pony and turn it loose, with the long lariat-rope trailing, but it devolved on Red Feather and Ripple to unload the pack-animals and set up the lodge, which they did with speed and skill, showing them to be old hands at the duty.

Then Montana George and Slocum took the saddles and packs from their own animals, and turned them loose to feed, which the hardy little ponies did with an avidity that showed they were far from being tired out with their long march of a whole night at a trot.

"How far do you suppose we've come?" asked Slocum, taking from his packs a map and spreading it out.

Rockwell considered.

"Durned if I know. Reckon this is the place they call Sweet Water Gulch, and they used to say it was fifty mile from Gladstone."

Slocum pored over his map which was a pen and ink sketch made up from military surveys.

"If it's Sweet Water Gulch," he said after a while, "you'r' pretty near right. It's here marked fifty seven miles by the odometer."

"Odometer! That's the wheel thing they use, ain't it?"

"Yes. It records all the ups and downs, so it doesn't give us an idea of the straight line, but fifty miles is about the distance I think, as the crow flies."

"Enough to make us safe," said George.

"They won't find out about the bateau being gone, till about now, and then they won't get fairly into the hunt for less than three hours. If that sentry tells all he knows and they get on the trail, they can't follow it over fast, and they can't come up with us till to-morrow, if we're still. If we move, we're a day ahead."

Slocum began to nod while his friend was speaking, and Montana George, observing it, said kindly:

"You better go to sleep. Bat and I are used to being on scouts, and you'll be all the fresher after a nap."

Slocum followed the advice and went fast asleep in a few minutes, to wake up with the warm sun shining on his face down the narrow ravine and to realize that it must be noon and he alone in camp.

He rubbed his eyes and rose up to look. The ponies had all sunk down in the grass and were lying at full length, stretched out like dogs in the sunshine, fast asleep.

The teepees stood close to him, and he judged, from the snoring of the inmates, that some one was asleep there too.

The flap of the doorway was open and he saw Ripple, with her baby in her arms, rolled up in a buffalo robe, while Red Feather was snoring on the opposite side of the teepee, all alone.

Bat and George were away.

Around him towered the rugged sides of the gulch, clothed with bushes, and he saw that some one had climbed up it very recently, from the way in which the bushes had been torn up by the roots in more than one place.

To ascend by the same path was the work of but a short time to the young man, and he arrived at the top, pretty well blown, to find Montana George and Bat lying extended on the short grass on the summit, fast asleep, so that they did not hear him.

They lay on what he realized to be the summit of the principal divide between two systems of ravines, and the ground sloped away all round them to the dead level of the prairie, above which they were raised possibly some fifty feet, so as to command a view of several miles.

Slocum saw, lying by the sleeping George, the field-glass, which had evidently fallen from the plainsman's hand while taking a view, from sleepiness.

He took it up and swept the horizon all round, when he caught sight, almost instantly, of a troop of horsemen, in columns of four, passing round the edge of the systems of ravines in which his little party was, and moving straight toward Fort Gladstone.

The direction of their course took them away from him, but he could see through the glass that they were soldiers, from the gleam of their accouterments.

A natural instinct of caution made him throw himself flat on the ground as soon as he saw the soldiers, and he pulled Montana's sleeve, whispering:

"Wake up! Party of soldiers!"

Montana George came broad awake in a moment, with a coolness that showed that he was used to night alarms and asked in a low tone:

"What is it?"

"Soldiers, I say. Over yonder."

Montana rolled over on his face and scanned the distant party.

Then he called to the Frenchman:

"Holloa! Bat! Soldiers!"

Bat instantly came awake in the same cool, collected way, ejaculating:

"Peste! it is too bad. I most sleep. Vat you say! Soldats! Mordieu! Vere?"

He caught sight of them before the question could be answered, and answered himself:

"It is a scout from de fort, and dey vill strike our trail before t'ree minute. Ve must saddle up and be off."

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," said Montana George. "Give the beasts a good chance to rest while ye can. They can't strike us fur several hours yet."

Bat Richards's only answer was to roll over and over to the edge of the ravine.

As he lowered himself from the top of the declivity, he said:

"It is dat dronk capitaine. I know him. He is diable. He will follow us hard. You see."

Slocum looked over at the dark spots on the plain at least five miles off.

To the naked eye they were faintly visible as dark dots.

The field-glass, which was a splendid instrument, separated the dots into horsemen and showed the glitter of arms, but that was all he could see.

Yet here was a man who, with the naked eye, unassisted, pronounced confidently on the identity of the leader of the party, as "dat dronk capitaine."

"Whom do you mean?" he asked as Bat began to lower himself.

"Dey call him Irlande. He drink all de time. De men call him Devil Major," was the hurried response. "You wait, you see he strike de trail and come straight here at once. *Au revoir*."

And the half-breed rolled down the side of the ravine in much haste, so that once or twice he nearly fell.

Montana George had made a motion for the glass, and lay watching the distant scouting-party.

"Reckon Bat's right," he said presently.

"It does look like Major Ireland's party."

"But how the deuce can you tell?" asked Slocum impatiently.

"Easy enough, Mr. Slocum. The major al-lers rides a big roan horse and that's him at the head of them all."

"But there are plenty of roan horses besides his, are there not?"

"You're right there; but, for all that, the major's the only officer rides a roan, and that roan yonder's rid by an officer."

"How do you know?"

"Easy enough. Ain't he all alone, a good six paces ahead of the rest? That's the Devil Major, or I'll eat my hat."

"Well, suppose it is, what of it?"

Montana George shook his head.

"Well, I'd sooner have any officer in the regiment after us than the Devil Major, that is, if he's got any whisky left in the canteens."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Montana George laughed.

"A good deal. I've been out with him afore, and he's a splendid officer till the whisky runs out."

"What does he do then?"

"Put's for the fort, the best he knows how. You don't ketch him out without whisky to float a small ship."

"Do you think he's short now?"

Montana George made no answer till he had earnestly watched the distant column for nearly a minute. Then he laid down the glass observing:

"I reckon not."

"Why?"

"He's moving along slow and easy, and he's got scouts out, looking for trails. He's a rip-pin' good man on a scout, and keen as an average Injun. Ha! Look!"

Slocum saw the distant party halt and close up in a bunch, like a cluster of bees, while a single figure rode out.

Through the glass he saw the roan horse, and saw its rider dismount and come straight toward the place where Slocum and George were lying, the roan horse following.

"He's found the trail," said Montana George coolly, "and it ain't no use hiding any more, Mr. Slocum. We've got to git up and git."

"Wait a bit," said Slocum. "I want to see if he'll really follow us."

"Follow us? Of course he will. Put it to yourself, Mr. Slocum, if you were sent off as a scout to find if any Injuns were missing from their agencies, and you come across a lodge-pole trail, wouldn't you investigate to find where that trail went?"

"Possibly I should."

"And that ain't all neither."

"What is it, then?"

"Major Ireland ain't no slouch of a trailer neither, and he's come round the edge of this lot of gulches and divides. He knows we hain't got out on the other side, or he'd have struck our trail. He knows we're in here, and don't you forget it. Look."

Slocum, looking through the glass, saw the dark party resume its march and come straight for the ravines at a fast pace.

Montana George hesitated no longer, but rolled over to the edge of the ravine, saying:

"I'll go down and saddle up, Mr. Slocum, while you watch. When I holler, you come down, but don't show yourself. If they've got any Injun trackers we'll be found, sure, but look out you don't lift your head."

With that he slid down the side of the ravine and Slocum returned to his post of observation, keeping his head behind a tuft of grass, and peeping through the blades of the herbage.

He saw the tracking-party come steadily on, following the plain trail made by the scraping lodge-poles, and before long he thought he could recognize the tall figure of Major Ireland in the advance, his horse going at a slow trot.

But there were no indications of Indian scouts with the troops, and before he could make up his mind on the subject, he heard the voice of Montana George hailing him from below.

CHAPTER XI.

A FORCED MARCH.

THE young engineer rolled over as he had seen the others do, and made the best of his way into the ravine, where he found Montana George and Bat waiting, the ponies all loaded up and the long poles of the lodge trailing from the saddles of two of the animals in the Indian fashion, called by the French trappers the *travois*, with the load fastened on the sticks about half-way between the pony and the ground.

His own riding animal had been brought up and tied to a bush, while Montana George was saying:

"Come, hurry up, hurry up. We can't wait any longer, or they'll ketch us before to-morrow night. Saddle up, Mr. Slocum."

"I should think you might have done that for me," returned Slocum, "seeing I was watching for you. I'd have done it for you."

Montana George stared.

"Well, you are green. You don't ketch us prairie men doin' no groom's dooty, I kin tell you, Mr. Slocum. It's every man fur himself on the plains. Did they have any scouts ahead?"

"Not that I saw," was the rather stiff reply, as Slocum began to saddle up.

"Then you foller on, while we go ahead with the lodge," said Montana briskly. "Don't lose sight of us. Go on, Bat."

The little procession moved off, Bat Richards leading, Montana George the last man, to drive up the packs, while the two Indian women were as useful as men on their ponies.

Slocum saddled up his own pony—a little sorrel, as tough as hickory, and as vicious and obstinate as a mule—and started off on the trail. He had to dig in his spurs savagely to make the animal follow, for Indian ponies have the peculiarity that they will be stubborn and self-willed under kind treatment, and as gentle as lambs under the most brutal punishment.

When Slocum finally got up to the tail of his little party, Montana George observed, with a glance at the pony:

"You're a-giving him too little work, Mr. Slocum. He'll be a-go'in' back on you."

"Going back on me? Why?"

"It don't do to treat a broncho like a reg'lar hoss. They ain't used to it and don't understand it. You've got to lam 'em all the time like the Injuns does, and then you'll get on with 'em. Don't you know what they say in Texas?"

"No. What's that?"

"They say that a white man'll ride a boss half a day, and leave him fur dead. Then'll come a Mexikin and take him twenty mile further and leave him as dead as the white man did. Then comes a Injun and rides him for a week more, and takes him into camp alive."

Slocum laughed.

"A very ingenious parable. How do you suppose they do it, George?"

George shrugged his shoulders.

"Lamming, I reckon. Leastwise, that's the only way I ever seen 'em do it. A Injun ain't got no feelin' fur a beast, no more'n you've got for a log you're a-splitting for wood. He'll get all there is out of a boss till it drops, and that's the truth of it, Mr. Slocum. Bat's jest like an Injun, and rides like 'em. Look at him. You'd never think he was a man fit to take part in their drills, would ye, now?"

Slocum looked at Bat Richards as he rode in the advance, and could not help being disgusted with the figure he cut on his horse.

The animal was accoutered with the regular Indian saddle with a high pommel and cantle, both hollowed out for convenience of hanging by arm and leg and shooting under the horse's neck in the Indian fashion.

The wooden stirrups were exceedingly short, and Bat sat crouched up like a monkey, his knees above the pommel, while his body rested on the small of his back, and he marked the time of every step of his horse with a light blow of the long buffalo whip he carried in his right hand, with a strap round the wrist, to let it hang on occasion.

A more prosaic and unimposing figure could hardly be found, for he was muffled up in an old buffalo-robe, from which half the hair had been worn off, and looked as if he was half asleep.

"No," said Slocum to George. "I should not think of him as fit to do any riding at all. He looks like an old woman."

George smiled.

"He can beat both of us on a horse, Mr. Slocum, and don't you forget it. Old Bat was adopted into the Sioux, I've heard say, because he could beat 'em all at the pick-up game."

"What's that?"

"Don't you know? Why I thought you was very nigh picked up yourself in the Yellowstone fight."

Slocum shuddered at the remembrance.

"Yes, I was, but that was no game."

"It's just this much of a game, that they practice at it all the time and drill like so many soldiers a-doing of it."

"What do they practice at?"

"At picking up each other."

"And why?"

"You see an Injun don't like to leave his dead bodies to be scalped any more'n a white man would; that's natural."

"Yes. I don't wonder at that."

"And if one of 'em gets killed or hit in a fight they'll do all they can to carry him off."

"Yes; and that's why they drill?"

"Sart'ly. Two of 'em'll rush past any common man and give him a swing up in the air, so as to carry him off over the saddle of one. They drill at it reg'lar, in all their camps. They take turns to play dead or wounded."

"To play dead?"

"Sart'ly. They go charging away, and one makes out he's shot and tumbles off his hoss at a dead run."

"Don't he get hurt?"

"Some of 'em do at first; but they larn how to tumble arter awhile. It's practice, practice all the time."

"Well?"

"Well, as soon as one tumbles, all the others make out they're skinned and run like blazes, till two of 'em in passing stoop over him and yank him up. If he makes believe he's only wounded it's easy enough, for he'll hold out his hands, but if he seems dead he jest lies flat, and they've got to do it by main strength and practice."

"I should imagine they were pretty perfect, from what experience I had."

"That's nothing. I've known men—and this Bat's one of them—that can pick up a man all alone, and hoist him."

"He must be strong then?"

"Reckon he is; but it ain't so much that as knowing how to do it. He uses the hoss a good deal to help him and the body comes up quick as wink."

Slocum looked over at the slouching and inelegant figure of the French half-breed, and could hardly believe the stories he heard of his skill in the saddle.

He was destined before the end of his journey to credit all and more than all he heard.

They passed along through the same maze of ravines as that by which they had come in, and Slocum could not but admire the certainty and skill with which the Frenchman piloted them.

At last, about an hour before sunset, they emerged on a green plain, clothed with grass much longer and richer than any they had yet seen, and Bat Richards told them:

"Dis vas de *Prairie du Lapin*, ve call it. You say 'Rabbit.' Ve must push on to get to de end before de moon set. After dat, ve laugh at de cavalerie."

"Why before the moon sets?" asked Slocum.

Bat made him no answer, but spoke to his wives in Sioux and set off at a trot.

Slocum noticed that, since they had got out into the wilderness and Bat had got his money and goods, he had become very scornful and disrespectful to the claims of the Order on which the engineer built such hopes.

He made no remark on it, but trotted on after the train, and for several hours they continued on their way through the long and very rich grass.

The ponies would have dearly liked to stop and feast; but Bat's pace was so fast and his resolution so inexorable that they had no chance; and the race, at a trot and canter, was kept up for hour after hour.

The sun set and darkness came on with the stars overhead, but Bat never faltered in his direction, steering by a star till the moon rose behind them, at about ten o'clock at night.

On they went at the same pace till the moon was high overhead, and all the ponies were covered with sweat; but the conductor had no

mercy, and Slocum could see him ambling away at the head, the same crouching, monkey-like figure, with his squaws following, and the pack-ponies jogging along to the tuneful sound of cracking whips.

He got ashamed of punishing his own pony with his spurs, but found that he had to do it or be left behind; for as soon as he ceased to urge the animal, it stood stock-still and tried to lie down and roll, seeming indifferent as to the companionship of its fellows, so long as it had a chance to rest and feed.

So he made up his mind to follow Bat's example and Montana George's advice, and do as the Indians did.

From the moment he became reckless and cruel, spurring savagely and having no care for his beast, the broncho was another creature, stretching away at a free hand gallop, apparently as fresh as when it started; and when the dawn at last supplanted the moon, Slocum saw before him, about a mile ahead, the yellow line of a sandy desert which he recognized as having passed on the Yellowstone Expedition on the sixth day out, and knew to be more than a hundred and thirty miles in a straight line from Fort Gladstone, which they had left only the night before.

Here Bat Richards halted, before reaching the sand, at a pool of water, and gave the signal to go into camp, by stripping his reeking horse of saddle and bridle and turning it out to graze, as carelessly as if he had never heard of founder or colic.

Slocum was so horrified at the idea, that he remonstrated on the imprudence of not keeping the animals from eating till cool; but Bat met him with the unanswerable argument, in broken English:

"Vat for no? You see dat horse. Suppose he be *savage*, you say wild. Ver' well. We chase and chase and he beat us. Well, we stop and let him go. Vat dat horse do? He stop and walk about so he no get cold before he eat and drink? No sare, he rush to de water. He drink, he roll in it. He get up, he kick, he jump. He say 'hal hal I beat you *mon ami*.' Den he go to eat. You leaf him alone. De horse he know vat he vant bettaire dan de man. Vat you say, Shorge?"

Montana George was unsaddling his own horse, and now he turned it loose with a slap, observing to Slocum:

"Horses on the plains, 'specially bronchos, ain't like horses in the East, Mr. Slocum. They're in the open air all the time, get fat on grass, and no one keers whether they live or die. Reckon they get on as well as if they was tumbled. But there ain't no half-way 'bout it. Turn him loose and let him take his chance, or feed him with grain and keep him in a stable. I'll let my feller chance it."

And, after watching some time, Slocum saw no symptoms of sickness among the hard-driven beasts.

Reeking with sweat as they were, and marked by cruel whips and spurs, they began to roll as soon as they were relieved of their burdens, kicked and bit at each other in vice and play, and behaved in anything but the style in which animals tired out would act.

"Tough as hickory saplings," said George, when Slocum commented on the fact. "And we'll want all their toughness. Old Ireland's coming after us for all he's worth."

CHAPTER XII.

A BOLD SCHEME.

THEY let the horses feed where they chose while the squaws pitched the teepee and began to cook, making a fire with dry sticks, almost destitute of smoke.

Their provisions consisted of Indian dried beef bought at Gladstone, and Slocum was not sorry to break into some canned meat for his own feed, having had nothing but the raw dried beef since the day before.

Bat ate but sparingly, and Montana George the same; while they were on their feet most of the time, scanning the plain round them for signs of some enemy.

Slocum, now that he was fairly out on the flat treeless plains, with an unrestricted view all round him, began to feel, for the first time, what a small party they had, and how far they were from human habitations.

"It's pretty lonely out here; isn't it?" he remarked to George Rockwell.

Montana George nodded absently:

"Ay, ay, lonesome enough. Wish it was more so, for my part."

"Why?"

"Cause as long as we don't see no one we're all right; but when we meet any humans they're pretty dead sure to be enemies, Mr. Slocum."

"What? The Indians or the whites?"

"Both," replied George, laconically.

"Why should the Indians hurt us?"

"Cause they'll want what we've got."

"But they'll see the lodge and take us for Indians."

"Maybe they will and maybe they won't. Injuns ain't so easy fooled on a trail."

"But we've no shod horses with us."

"That's true; but they'll know there's white

men in the party, as soon as they strike the trail."

"Why?"

"From the way we ride."

"Way we ride? How's that? I don't quite understand what you mean. How can a man tell from a trail the character of the rider of an animal unless he has a shod horse?"

Montana George smiled, and said to Bat:

"Here, Bat, you tell him. I ain't as good as you on a trail, though I don't give in to no common white man on it. Tell Mr. Slocum how you could find out whether a Injun or a white man rode a pony."

Slocum seconded the request by saying in French to the half-breed:

"My brother is at home on the plains, as I am at home under the Black Cloud. When we reach Sitting Bull's camp I will give him of my knowledge. Now let him give to me of his. I am a child that waits to be instructed."

Bat Richards instantly relaxed from his scornful superiority and became as gracious as possible, but patronizing to a degree that would have irritated some men, though it only amused Slocum.

"You come vid me," he said. "I show you how ve trail."

He made a circuit with Slocum in the grass, till they came on the trail they had taken to come to camp.

"You look dere," he said, "and tell me how many horse pass?"

"But I know that already," objected Slocum, looking at the track and feeling hopelessly confused.

Bat laughed.

"Ver' goot. Now you tell me vich vas de first horse pass here, and vich vas de last. Pick out de track."

Slocum looked some time, Bat watching him with a smile on his dark face.

Presently the young man said:

"I think this one must have been the last, because it's plain all the way through."

Bat nodded and smiled.

"Tres bien—ver' well. You haf eyes and use dem. Yes, dat is de last. Who rode him?"

"I don't know."

Bat laughed heartily.

"Eh, *mon Dieu*! you ride him."

"How do you know?"

Bat stooped down and pointed to the hoof-track, saying:

"Dat is easee. You see de shape of dat foot. It was different from de rest. I know dat horse—he have a foot like a mule. Dat was your horse. You go look when you go back, you see. You learn all de track of all de horse. Dat is first t'ing. S'pose you get lose from de camp, how you get back you no tell de track of your own horse—bat?"

Slocum colored slightly.

"I know I'm ignorant, but I want to learn," he answered. "Now tell me if there is any difference between the track of a horse ridden by a white man and an Indian?"

"Certainement," replied Bat, looking as if no one but a fool could dispute the statement under any circumstances. "Certainement. Vy not? You ride like de white man, hard on de horse shoulder. He make deep track front, light one behind—dat is easee."

Slocum was puzzled.

"What's that you say?" he asked. "I ride hard on the horse's shoulder. I don't understand you."

Bat laughed again and said to Montana George who was listening with a grin on his sunburnt face:

"You tell heim vat I mean. I am not good viz ze Engleesh."

Montana translated.

"Reckon Bat means that you and he ride different ways. You sit up in your seat and ride in a Whitman saddle that comes well on the horse's shoulder. You carry your legs well down and sit far forward, with most of your weight on the beast's forelegs, so they make a deep track. That's how he knows a white man rides the hoss."

"But don't every one ride the same?"

Montana laughed.

"Not much. Bat rides Injun-fashion, so as to let all four legs get it even on the march, with the hind legs a little the most weight, 'cause they're the best able to bear it. Then he lets his pony go like a free hoss, only keeping him on the move, and his track ain't as straight as yours, unless he's on the war-path. Then it's one hoss arter the other in one track, so it takes a master hand at trailin' to tell how many's passed. That's how he tells whether a Injun rode it or not."

This first lesson in trailing interested the young engineer so much that he spent an hour on the trail of his own party, with Bat and Montana for mentors, trying to interpret from the signs what the different animals had done at times, and gaining great pleasure from his acquisitions in knowledge.

He was so intent on his track that he forgot everything else, and was recalled from his abstraction by a sharp cry from Bat, who exclaimed:

"Peste! Mordieu! It is de Devil Major! Ciel, but he haf made haste."

Slocum looked up and round, but could see nothing on the prairie to justify the exclamation, till Montana, who had the glass at his eye, corroborated Bat.

"By gosh! It is the Devil Major and no one else. He must have put like a streak. What'll we do, Bat?"

The half-breed looked regretfully at the ponies, feeding so greedily upon the rank herbage, and then shook his fist in a vengeful manner at the distant major, whom Slocum could not spy, even with the glass.

"Saccerre nom," he growled. "If he would leaf me alone till de night, I would not care; but ve haf to cross de sand, and dey must be fet, to last it in dis veddaire."

Montana George looked glum.

"Who'd have thought he'd march like that?" he said, savagely. "I wish I could get at his canteen I'd spill his whisky fur him, darned quick, and then he'd put for the fort sure."

Bat made a gesture of disgusted and unwilling resignation, as he said:

"Il faut aller—we most go. It is no use to wait. He vill catch us. Let us go and saddle up."

They went back to the ponies, while Slocum tried to make out the party of whose advance they seemed to be so certain.

After sweeping the horizon in vain for some time, he caught sight of some dark dots and counted five in a row, with something dark behind them that he took for the column. He had hardly spied it when he heard Montana George shouting:

"Come, hurry up, Slocum, no time to fool if you don't want to go back to the fort. I didn't hire to do all the work."

Then he went back and helped pack and saddle the ponies, who grunted their disapproval of the move as they were being girthed, and made all the resistance they could, in their obstinate way.

Inside of half an hour they were all packed and moving out, when Montana George, who had been talking earnestly to Bat, approached Slocum, saying:

"Mr. Slocum, Bat and I have been holding a powwow."

"Yes?"

"And we think it's a darned shame the sogers should try to spoil our game."

"So do I; but what are you going to do about it?"

"I'll tell you, sir, if you're game for a little muss."

Slocum looked surprised.

"A muss? What do you mean? We can't fight them."

Bat interposed eagerly.

"No, no, I no say fight. Not fight. But I say stop dem, so dey go no furdur."

"And how will you do that?"

The half-breed laughed.

"Steal de horse. Let dem go home on de two feet."

Slocum started. The idea had not occurred to him before.

"How can you do that?" he asked.

Montana George answered him.

"All we want you to do is to go on with the squaws to the next camp, and we will steal the horses."

"Thank you," answered Slocum dryly. "I'd rather let you go on, and I'll stay behind with one of you, and see the stealing is done without bloodshed. I am the man who will suffer if we are found out, and it is a serious thing to steal horses out here."

Montana George shrugged his shoulders.

"As you please. I ain't anxious to undertake the job myself I assure you. But you ain't able for it."

"I can do what I'm told."

"Maybe you can; but I suppose you know what you'll have to do?"

"No. But I can be told."

"You'll have to stay here without a boss," said George, looking him in the eye. "Lay out all night while the rest of us go on, with the sogers looking fur ye, and then stampede the horses and git off the best way ye know how, bareback."

"Will Bat be with me?"

"Sart'in he will. Ye'll have to stick pretty close together, too, and if they ketch ye it'll be all day with ye."

Slocum drew a deep breath. The scheme was a daring one, but he was young and full of pluck, and it was the only one that promised a cessation of the pursuit of the scouting-party.

"I'll do it," he said, "if Bat will trust me to help him."

Then turning to the Frenchman, he pursued, in the language the latter best understood:

"I trust my brother with my life. On his faith I repose. Will he give me the pledge?"

Bat hesitated a moment.

"It will be a hard task, brother," he said, "and you will need to have a hard heart."

"Yet you trust this man, who is not a Brother of the Cloud," returned Slocum, steadily eyeing him.

Bat looked confused.

"It is not that I doubt your faith," he said, "but you are from the East. Can you ride a horse without saddle or bridle and change at full speed?"

"I can. I have ridden bareback many a time," said Slocum promptly.

Bat bowed his head gravely.

"My brother shall go with me," he said; "and I promise not to desert him."

Then turning to George, he said:

"Go. I vill stay vid my brodair."

Montana George nodded rather in a doubtful way. As he was about to ride off he said to Slocum:

"You're clear grit, Mr. Slocum, and no mistake, if you come out alive. Good-by, if I never see ye again. I'll take the horses and go. You don't need nothing but a whip and a bit of rope for a halter. Put yer duds where they won't shake off and God bless ye."

Ten minutes later the cavalcade was moving off over the sandy desert at a trot, while Bat Richards and Slocum, alone and unarmed, were sneaking away along the edge of the grass to a safe hiding-place to await the approach of the cavalry scouting-party.

CHAPTER XIII.

WATCHING.

THE place where Bat Richards had elected to hide was a quarter of a mile from the spot where the teepees had been pitched, and the half-breed made his approach thereto with true Indian care and caution.

The ground where the grass melted into the sand was so hard that it left no impressions of footsteps, and Bat told Slocum to take off his boots and follow him, turning his toes in as he walked, a matter of some difficulty with the young engineer.

They saw nothing of the cavalry scouting-party, but succeeded in hiding themselves in such a position that they commanded a distant view of the pool, and the place where the teepees had been pitched.

Then they lay down in the light of the noon-day sun, and Slocum found it difficult to keep awake after his fatigue.

The night before had been cold, and the sun was very grateful with its heat.

"Sleep, brother," said Bat gravely. "They will not be here till sunset, and they will camp by the pool."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because their horses will be tired, and the men, too. The sand-trail is so plain, they will think to follow it easy by the light of the moon, but they will need to give their horses rest and food before crossing the sand. They are right. No one but the Devil Major would have got so far so soon. Sleep safely. I shall sleep too."

And the half-breed set the example by closing his eyes, when Slocum followed suit in a few moments.

How long he slept he could not tell; but he was waked by a pull at the sleeve, and found Bat lying by him, while the sound of voices, not far off, told him that the soldiers had come.

He turned his head slowly in that direction, and could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise.

The sun had set, but it was still bright twilight, and below him, not three hundred yards off, a herd of horses was feeding, while the guards were cracking their whips to keep the animals from straying, and the voice of Major Ireland was calling out:

"Get your suppers quick, boys. As soon as the moon rises we move out. We'll have the scoundrels before noon of to-morrow."

Slocum caught sight of the tall figure of the major moving about, and thanked his stars that it was growing dusk as fast as October evenings admitted.

The soldiers of the escort seemed to be tired, for they moved about slowly and wearily, picking up sticks or pulling up bushes for fires, and Slocum heard a good deal of grumbling.

Some of them in their search came within twenty yards of where he lay, and he heard one say to the other:

"Be gob, Mike, fur tin cints the ould horse w'd go lame to-night."

"And fur five I'd stick a spike in the ould roan's hind leg," returned the other in the same grumbling tone. "Divil Jack ought to get shot."

"And so he is, bedad, shot in the neck, and bad luck to him fur an ould soak," the first man retorted savagely. "Av a man c'd only get at the crater's canteen, and put a hole in it, we'd go back; but as long as he's crazy, he'll march us and march us till we drop."

Slocum saw the men distinctly close to him, and the glare of a fire, just lighted, showed the yellow stripes of a corporal on the sleeves of the one who had just spoken so bitterly.

The second man shook his fist at the fire at which the tall figure of Ireland could be seen, and Slocum saw that the big major was just taking a drink from a canteen.

"Ay, ay, swill away, ye ould thief," said he savagely. "And wouldn't we all like to see ye

gone in the jim-jams, so we'd have an excuse to tie ye."

Here the voice of the "Devil Major" himself broke in on the colloquy, shouting:

"Holloa there, you two men up there. Come in. What are you hanging out there for? Do you want to get laid out by Indian prowlers? Look to those horses. Don't you see they're scattering? Confound your lazy carcasses! I'll make some of you walk to-morrow and lead your horses into the bargain."

The men addressed seemed to be cowed by the major's tone, for they sauntered off toward the fire muttering and swearing the whole way, but obeying the order for all that.

Bat whispered to Slocum in French:

"They will not keep good watch. You mark the word. He will have trouble when the moon rises, to wake them up."

Slocum thought he was right, but he noticed that the major seemed to have perfect control over his men and was well seconded by two younger officers who were with him and very active.

The two spies watched from their covert till the men had all had their supper and heard the order:

"All fires out now, and no talking. Get your saddles in line and lie down on your arms. The horse-guard will be held responsible if the herd get out of this bottom. When the moon rises we start. Till then all can sleep but the guard."

Slocum heard these orders in the still night air, as distinctly as if they had been spoken in the same room, though the speaker was several hundred yards off, and Bat whispered to him:

"It is well. We begin now very soon."

"When?" asked Slocum, his heart beating more rapidly with excitement than it had since he was watching the sentry at Fort Gladstone.

"When they are asleep," replied Bat. "You will see, they will sleep well."

He began slowly to creep out of his lair in the grass as he spoke and the younger man followed in the same cautious way. Both were stripped for action.

Bat wore only a breechcloth and had painted his body dark by rolling in the mud and letting it dry on, so that it served the double purpose of a disguise in the dark and a protection against the nipping night air.

Slocum had a dark-blue, skin-tight rowing-shirt, and had rubbed his arms with the same mud so that he was practically invisible in the dark, though he retained his leather breeches and boots, the latter against Bat's advice.

Each man had with him his whip, with a short handle like a policeman's club and the long lash that goes by the name of "black-snake" or "quirt," in different parts of the country; and each had round his waist a piece of thin tough rope for a halter.

They moved a few feet and then lay still watching, while the cavalrymen were putting their saddles in a line and preparing for a sleep.

Within ten minutes after one might hear the snoring all over the camp and the only persons left awake were the three officers who sat at one end of the line, talking in low tones and apparently watching the horse-guards who kept moving about armed with whips to keep the horses from straying.

Every now and then came a vicious squeal from the herd, followed by a hollow "thud" "thud" as two of the horses got into a squabble over some patch of herbage, and then came a burst of scolding and whip-cracks from the horse-guards as they chased the fighters away.

Bat lay and listened for nearly half an hour and then whispered:

"S'vitez moi." (Follow me.)

He slipped off like a snake through the grass, going only a few feet at a time and frequently stopping to listen.

All was quiet in the camp and the voices of the officers grew less and less frequent as the spies got into the hollow.

Presently they were down within a hundred yards of the horses, and within fifty feet of one of the horse-herders who was slouching along, muffled in his overcoat evidently sleepy and from sulky the vicious way in which he slapped at any horse that happened to stray outward from the herd.

Bat crept on like a snake till he was less than ten feet from the man's long beat and waited till the soldier had gone to the other end.

Then he whispered to Slocum.

"Now, my brother, you shall see how we of the Black Cloud in the West steal horses."

There was something in his tone that alarmed Slocum who whispered back:

"No murder, remember."

"No, no," answered Bat. "No murder. It is not necessary with these fellows."

As he spoke the horse-guard came slouching back.

Bat let him come close by and pass within ten feet.

Slocum, unused to such closeness to an enemy, felt his heart beating hard, but lay still, till the man passed, when to his surprise Bat whispered:

"Now, forward."

With that, both men glided forward into the path of the sentry behind his back and Bat whispered:

"Tie the grass."

Slocum understood him and obeyed the order, bending over the long grass on either side the path and tying it together in haste.

He had hardly completed his task when Bat whispered:

"Retire toi, donc—retire [toi]." (Come back then, come back.)

Obedient without hesitation, he slipped back to the side of the path and Bat lay beside him.

"Now," whispered the Frenchman, "take the lash of your whip and wind it around your wrist. When he falls, hit him on the head hard with the butt. Hard, mind, hard!"

"But we may kill him," objected Slocum.

Bat Richards clutched his arm savagely.

"Do you want him to kill you?" he asked.

"It is kill or be killed here, brother. Are you going back on the Black Cloud? Here he comes now. Be ready."

Thus urged, Slocum had no choice but to obey, for he realized that Bat's advice was sound, and he had promised to obey the Frenchman's orders implicitly.

"I'm ready," he said softly.

The horse-guard came sleepily on every now and then stumbling, till he came opposite to them.

Then Bat drew up his legs for a spring and Slocum followed suit.

The next moment the doomed man caught his foot in the tied grass and fell prone on the ground with a muttered grunt and curse.

"Holy smoke!" he ejaculated. "Is it tight I am that I can't walk straight?"

With that he began to get up again on all-fours, looking instinctively toward the horses which had started at the fall and calling soothingly:

"Whoa there! Whoa! What are ye 'fraid of? Whoa! Steady!"

To Slocum, hearing the accents of his own tongue thus innocently spoken, the task of striking down the defenseless man was very repugnant, but he had no choice.

Before the horse-guard could look round, Bat Richards had leaped to his feet and made one spring to the poor man's side.

"Crack! thud!"

Slocum saw the half-breed strike him on the head with the loaded butt of the whip, and the man fell like a log and lay still, when Bat raised the whip to repeat the blow with all his force and malignity, about which there was no mistake.

In that moment the young engineer sprang to his comrade's side and caught his wrist, whispering:

"Enough! enough! You promised not to kill him and you shall not."

He saw the fierce glare of the half-breed's eyes as he looked up, but Bat only said:

"Comme tu veux." (As you please.)

CHAPTER XIV.

STAMPEDING THE STOCK.

FURTHER contention was cut short by the voice of a man calling out:

"Corporal of the guard, number four!"

Bat heard it and instantly dropped to the earth, whispering:

"En avant! en avant! On nous entend." (Forward! forward! They hear us.)

Slocum followed him, and they crept forward like snakes to where the horses were feeding.

As they came close, Slocum began to fear he would be trampled on, but his comrade glided boldly into the herd, and in a few moments more they were both hidden from view. Then Bat rose to his feet, the horses snorting and starting away from him and threatening to make a stampede before the time came.

They heard excited voices calling to each other outside the herd:

"Injuns! Injuns! Look out!"

Then came a hubbub in camp, and Major Ireland roared:

"Stand to your arms! Don't leave the saddles! Horse-guards, drive in the herd."

Slocum hardly knew what to do in the emergency, but followed Bat's example by moving quietly toward the nearest horse, and keeping his hands down.

Presently he stood beside a big roan horse that put its ears back and threatened to bite.

Hardly knowing why he did it, he dealt the animal a cut with his whip which caused it to retreat, while it startled several others in the vicinity, and set them huddling together for protection.

"Allons!" said Bat.

With that he walked straight to the huddled group, caught a horse by the fore lock, and in a moment more had the noose of his rope round its lower jaw, in a rude but effectual bridle.

Slocum followed his example with equal skill, for he had often practiced the act with colts at pasture.

The noise outside had increased and the cracks of the stable-guards' whips were audible as they tried to drive the horses together, not yet dreaming that their foes were in the midst of the herd.

The horses came closer in, tumbling and plunging, leaving an open space in the center

of the herd, where the two men were standing, and backing away from it instinctively.

Bat Richards still stood by his captive, glancing keenly round but not offering to mount, though Slocum expected to hear him yell every moment.

Suddenly he raised his whip-hand to his horse's mane, crying:

"Houp-la!"

In a moment both men had leaped up, Bat uttered a shrill war-whoop, and away went the whole herd in a wild rush, right over the soldiers by the saddles, the horses huddled close together and leaping with wild bounds as if trying to jump out of their skins with terror.

To Slocum the next ten minutes were a whirl of confusion.

He was sensible of being carried off at a tremendous burst of speed, while the pressure on his legs, as the animals rushed on, huddled close together, became so agonizing that he yelled unconsciously with the pain and struck round him like a madman with his long whip.

The huddling ceased as soon as they struck the sand outside the grass, and then away they went, as hard as the horses could gallop, squealing and snorting all the way.

Every now and then came a fearful howl in the midst of the herd, and Bat was seen there, flourishing his whip and laying it on for all he was worth, to keep from having his legs broken. They kept up this tremendous burst of speed, hour after hour, till the moon rose behind them, and then the excitement abated somewhat, while Slocum managed to make his way to the front, beside Bat Richards, and found the redoubtable half-breed mounted on the very roan horse Slocum had failed to catch at the first stampede.

Bat looked round and grinned in high good humor, observing:

"Ve got dem goot, dat time, ha?"

Slocum was out of breath with his rapid ride, and asked, panting:

"What are we going to do now?"

Bat laughed scornfully.

"Do! Ve do vat ve please now. All de Devil Major no catch us now."

"But where are our friends?"

Bat pointed ahead.

"En avant—forward. You did not see why I wait, till de herd was head in de right way. Abal Morbleu! I was not born yesterday. See de trail. We come up before day."

He pointed over his horse's head to the sand, where the broad plain trail of the party, with the scratching imprint of the lodge-poles, was as easily to be seen as a common wagon road.

"You change horse; ha?" he asked presently, as they galloped on.

"No. Have you?"

"Certainement. Dis is de Devil Major's horse. You know him. Bonne bete. Goot beast. Goot! You take—ha—let me see—oui—you take dat black. He is strong."

The black he referred to was a very handsome creature, looking like a thoroughbred, leading the herd with ease, and frequently looking back and neighing to the rest to come on.

Slocum tried to get alongside of it, but his own horse was not equal to the effort, and Bat had to speak to the big roan and slacken the pace of the whole herd, when the black stopped of its own accord and came running into the band.

Evidently it was a docile, gentle beast, for it made no resistance when the young engineer got beside it and patted its neck soothingly.

In a very few moments the rope-halter had been transferred from one horse to the other, and the whole mob set off again at an easy amble of some six or seven miles an hour.

"Well, brother," said Bat, in French, "and how do you like the life of the Brethren of the Black Cloud? Have we not taken all the horses as I said?"

Slocum nodded thoughtfully.

"We have done it," he answered, "and every one has the Government stamp on it, too. What shall we do if we meet another scouting-party?"

Bat laughed at the idea.

"We meet no more scouting-parties now, and in another day we shall be in the hunting-grounds of our friends—of the Sioux and Cheyennes."

"But what shall we do with these horses when we get there? They are not ours, and we can't sell them."

Bat laughed louder than before.

"Brother, you are green as the grass we left, but we will teach you in time. Each of these horses is worth a squaw, and we can be sure of a welcome in any tribe where we go."

"But we shall be unable to return to civilization. They will call us horse-thieves."

"What is to hinder us from staying where we are, brother? I have tried the white man's life and the Indian's, and am nowhere so happy as on the plains. You will say the same when you have tried it."

The half-breed's tone was serious, and he was evidently in earnest.

"You are a Brother of the Black Cloud, high in the council," he pursued. "Why should you stay among the whites and work hard for small

pay, to be looked on with contempt by the rich thieves? You may be a prince among our people if you wish."

"How?" asked Slocum.

He began to recognize in the half-breed, now they were alone in the desert, a much superior type of man to the dirty, degraded savage who had crouched in his squalid poverty by the teepee fire in Squaw-man's Hole.

Bat Richards, out in the wilderness, was a man in the full sense of the word, his figure erect and supple, his voice clear and ringing, devoid of the gruff, guarded intonation he used when among the people of civilization, and altogether, the young engineer was surprised at the change in his comrade.

"But how is it possible," he said, "for a man who has been used to living among people who know about railroads and steamboats to be happy among men who cannot even read and write? You are not an Indian, Baptiste; you have seen better things, have you not?"

Baptiste threw up his head proudly.

"It is just," he answered. "I am not all you think me; no more are some of those you call savages. Did you ever hear that the great Sitting Bull, and Chief Joseph of the Nez Percés, were educated among white people?"

Slocum smiled.

"Yes, I've heard the story, but surely it is not true. That is absurd."

Bat laughed rather scornfully.

"We shall see, some day. Do you talk the Latin, by chance?"

"Latin?" echoed Slocum. "No. I can translate it, of course, but it is a dead language nowadays, except among Catholic priests."

"Exactly. And did you never hear of the pious Father de Smedt?"

"Yes, I've heard he has been among the Indians many years, and is much respected by them."

The half-breed bowed his head with a gesture of great respect.

"It is just. Father de Smedt can go on foot and unarmed to any tribe on the plains. He can go to the agencies among the white men, and travel through the midst of war-parties, and no one will hurt him. Father de Smedt is a man that knows no fear, and we love him."

"But what has he to do with Sitting Bull? Shall we see him, by chance, where we are now going?"

"You will."

Slocum was surprised.

"I did not think that."

"Father de Smedt is in Sitting Bull's camp, and we shall doubtless see him. You will see there many things that will cause you surprise."

"As for instance?"

Bat shook his head and laughed as he replied: "Study up your Latin. You will need it and your French too with the good father and Sitting Bull."

"With Sitting Bull! Where in the world did he learn Latin?" asked Slocum, more incredulous than before.

But Bat only laughed and replied:

"We shall see. You have thought, doubtless, that you were the only Brother of the Black Cloud that had the knowledge of the whites; but you will find that there are others that know as much as yourself, and yet prefer the life of the plains."

As he spoke he gave a swing of his great whip and lapsed into the wild Indian again, with a yell and a crack of the long lash, that set the horses off at a gallop which lasted till the moon was high in the sky, and they saw, ahead of them, the dark outlines of their own little party of pack-ponies.

Then Bat called Slocum alongside, and said to him, pointing ahead:

"You are a Brother of the Cloud, and will know much that no Gentile knows. Remember that, on your secrecy depends your life. Not a word to George."

CHAPTER XV.

LONE CALF.

OUT in the valley of the Yellowstone the air was warm and filled with the dreamy softness of the October haze, when a hunting-party of Indians, that had been lying in wait for the fall buffalo, stopped on the summit of one of the ridges overlooking the valley, and scanned the plains with eager eyes, looking toward the Bad Lands.

They were at the edge of a district of this remarkable formation, and had news from their scouts that the buffalo from the North were coming up that way.

One of the Indians had no sooner reached the top than he pointed out to the east.

"Traders coming in with horses," he said. "They will scare off the buffalo if they are not stopped."

"Let Lone Calf go and stop them," said the leader of the party, an old Indian with a horribly scarred face and one eye. He had been disfigured by an explosion of gunpowder once on a time, and had acquired the nickname of Powder Face, by which he was renowned for deeds of desperate daring.

Lone Calf was the young hunter who had first spoken.

He made no answer but to bow his head and set off at a break-neck pace, over ground where an American horse would have fallen a dozen times inside of the first mile, his pony skipping over the cracks and lumps with as much safety as over a smooth meadow.

These "Bad Lands" into which he was entering were a sufficiently desolate place for any man to pause before daring their recesses.

Ages before their top, which was some seventy-five feet above the level of the ravines between them, had been the bottom of a great inland lake, which had dried up, and in drying had cracked open the soft strata in chasms that ran clear through the clays of which the bed was formed.

The rains and snows of winter and spring had widened these chasms and deepened them, by carrying off the soil at the bottom, till the whole face of the country was cut into thousands of sharp ridges and ravines, crossing each other in a maze of tracks, but every year growing deeper, with the ridges between them sharper.

It was like the ordinary network of prairie gulches and divides, only ten times worse; for the ordinary prairie ravines are passable at the bottom or along the summits of the divides, but the Bad Lands are not practicable for a wagon, and very difficult for horses.

Nevertheless, Lone Calf made his way from bottom to bottom at a keen run, only slackening his pace when the ground was strewn with boulders fallen from the banks, and totally regardless of the grand scenery round him.

For the Bad Lands to a passenger are full of wonders.

All around Lone Calf towered perpendicular cliffs of yellow clay, banded with broad belts of sky-blue, creamy-white, vivid scarlet, black and golden yellow, till they resembled an artificial erection in the Chinese taste.

Every band was as straight and clearly defined as if drawn with a ruler, and the colors were the same on both sides of the ravine, and in every ravine that crossed them as he rode on.

Not a spear of grass, save on the top of the ridges; and everywhere these unnatural-looking bands of colored clays, clay-slates, and coal, with beds of ochre-yellow that would be worth many thousand dollars, could they be transported East for the color-market.

To all these the young Indian was sublimely indifferent. He had seen them before, and lived among them from boyhood.

The wonders of nature and the beauties of scenery affected him nothing, save that he was always on the lookout for game; and game generally frequented beautiful places, but kept clear of Bad Lands.

On he went, winding and twisting among the ravines, but never losing sight of his direction among them.

He had caught sight of what he knew to be a trading party, nearly ten miles off, and knew they were entering the Bad Lands, while he also knew that the buffalo were migrating to the south through those very Bad Lands, and that if not stopped, he and his fellow-hunters would have all the winter meat they wanted, while, if the trading party turned back the buffalo, the herds would give them a severe chase and little meat.

Lone Calf was a young man who had not yet taken a scalp, though he had been out alone so often when only a boy, looking for glory that they had nicknamed him the Lone Calf—a name he fondly hoped to change some day to Lone Wolf or Bear, if he could only kill enough men.

That was his grand ambition, as it is of every Indian boy, to be a successful slayer of men, and if he could only steal plenty of horses besides, he would be a full-fledged warrior, and worthy to wear an eagle-feather in his war-bonnet.

At present Lone Calf was content to turkey-f feathers. He had not even got a necklace of wolf claws. He was a specimen of disappointed ambition, being eight or nine years old, without a scalp at his belt, even so much as a child's.

When he first started out he had an idea that he might get a scalp among the traders, but a moment's reflection convinced him that this would not do.

Traders, especially carrying guns and ammunition, were held sacred by a decree of the combined councils of the five tribes that had confederated in the Yellowstone Valley to resist the further progress of the railroad and had already turned back a powerful expedition of United States troops with considerable slaughter and glory.

Lone Calf knew that if he took a scalp from a trader coming in, however the deed might tempt him, he stood a chance of being disciplined by the "dog-soldiers," and they had a way of skinning men alive for punishment if necessary.

So Lone Calf rode on to meet the party, and as soon as he got in sight, he began to make peaceful signals by holding up his hand with

the palm toward the new-comers, and waving his lance with the point downward.

He used his eyes well on the advance, and saw that the party consisted of two white men, a half-breed and two squaws, with quite a little string of pack-ponies and a large herd of horses driven loose.

All the animals looked gaunt and half-starved, while their feet were in very bad condition from traveling on hard ground, but the driven horses were for the most part shod, and the Indian saw on their shoulders the brand that he had seen so many times and knew to be the Government mark, though he could not read a letter.

To him the brand "U. S." was nothing but a "bow and snake," and as such he called it to himself, while he advanced, his dark eyes glowing with envy at the treasures he saw before him.

The half-breed, who was dressed in the Indian costume, rode to the front and made the sign of amity, while his party halted and he advanced to meet the young Indian.

It was interesting to see the way in which they eyed each other, both trying to seem indifferent, but watching like cats, their rifles lying across their knees, as they advanced sidewise, keeping the left front to the stranger, ready for a shot on the first suspicious motion or look.

The half-breed spoke first:

"Whence comes the Cut Throat?"

Cut Throat is the meaning of Dakotah, the Indian name of Sioux.

Lone Calf answered with a question:

"Whence comes the stranger?"

"From the East, with cartridges for the warriors and horses for chiefs to ride on to battle," said Bat.

"My tribe is on the fall hunt and cannot trade till the beasts are all skinned," said Lone Calf, stiffly. "The stranger must come no further, or he will frighten them away."

Bat made a gesture of assent.

"It is good. But we cannot turn back, and this is no place to camp. We have come far, and taken many horses from the white soldiers. Is the Sitting Bull with the hunters?"

Lone Calf smiled slightly. The question was an impertinence, and he knew it.

"The Sitting Bull is a chief in council," he answered, evasively, "and his way is under the cloud. The stranger must pass out the way he came, or wait till the hunt is over."

"Who speaks?" asked Bat, imperiously. "It is a boy that never heard of the Horse Chief."

Lone Calf looked confused.

He had heard of the Horse Chief before, as a celebrated warrior, who had married a daughter of Sitting Bull; but he hated to give his own name till it had been gilded with some renown.

So he affected disbelief and retorted:

"It is easy to say you are the Horse Chief, but I am no boy to believe all that a stranger says."

Bat curled his lip.

"You are a boy that never took a scalp," he said, scornfully. "Throw down your weapons, and I will show you if I am the Horse Chief."

Lone Calf instantly pointed his rifle.

"If you are the Horse Chief, show it on some one else," he answered. "I have heard the Horse Chief can raise a man single-handed, and has the Ripple for a squaw. Let me see it proved."

"Fall back then," said Bat, imperiously. "I will show you who I am, and after that, you shall take the whip."

The young Indian hesitated.

He was not certain if the stranger was deceiving him, and he knew that if he made a mistake and the other were really the renowned Horse Chief, his own existence would be decidedly uncomfortable for the next few months.

The Horse Chief had the name of being a merciless antagonist, though the tribe had not seen him for years.

"If my brother is the Horse Chief," he said more politely, "I would not be wanting in respect; but Powder Face sent me to stop you, and I must do my duty or be punished."

Bat's countenance cleared at once.

"Powder Face is a warrior, and rides in the night. If he sent you it is well. We will retire. But you are a boy and should not talk so loud before men."

Lone Calf let his rifle fall instantly.

"Powder Face sent me. I will lead you to the valley if you wish," he said.

Bat waved his hand politely.

"It is well. Do so," he answered.

The young Indian dashed across the front of the party, full speed, and Bat followed him more slowly, down a side ravine and through a maze of similar places, till they emerged in the green valley of the Yellowstone, and saw before them a magnificent spectacle.

The whole valley seemed to be crowded with a black mass of buffalo, moving on at a trot straight toward the Bad Lands, at a point some six miles above the place whence they had just

emerged, and a crowd of mounted Indians were harassing their flanks, spearing and shooting, so that the onward path of the vast herd was marked by a stream of dead bodies, past which the hunters rode as fast as ever, taking new victims at every stride.

Bat uttered a yell of delight.

"Now you shall see life," he cried.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEST.

LIFE indeed it was, wild life, full of the most maddening excitement, that met the gaze of the young engineer, as he looked on at the hunt.

Everything was on a grand scale, and in such rapid motion that the scene was indescribably thrilling.

The buffalo at the head of the column were running ahead, while those in the rear rushed frantically from side to side, to escape from their persecutors, or else charged desperately at the flying horsemen, who hung round them like so many wasps, evading the charges and stinging all the time.

Bat Richards seemed beside himself at the sight, and called to Slocum:

"Now, brother, strip and come in. We shall have meat as well as the rest."

He began to strip off his clothes as he spoke, throwing them on the ground, while the two squaws, without waiting for orders, gathered their pack-ponies into a bunch, and began to hopple them securely, before unloading to go into camp by the Bad Lands.

Montana George looked disturbed, and called earnestly to Slocum:

"Don't ye go in there. It's as much as a white man's life's worth."

Bat heard him and screamed in French:

"I tell you to come. It will make you a name among them. You are with us or against us. The Black Cloud itself will not protect you, if you do not keep close to me."

Slocum hesitated no longer. He knew that he was entirely at the mercy of the Indians, and must gain their confidence at any hazard; so he hastily stripped to the waist, and, a few minutes later, was following Bat into the fray, his horse, that had been so jaded but a little before, now wild with excitement and crazy for the hunt.

Slocum had hunted buffalo before; but not like an Indian.

One old bull, the shaggiest and grandest he could pick out, had been his solitary victim on the Yellowstone Expedition, but here he saw the Indians, with their bows and arrows, dropping only the fat cows, and thinking no more of a single victim than a butcher of a sheep.

Faithful to the plan he had formed of sticking close to Bat, he followed the example of the half-breed, keeping at his heels, and learned a good deal of buffalo-hunting in this, his first genuine lesson.

He found that his former teachers, the cavalry soldiers and officers, had been mere bitches at the work compared to the Indians.

Bat never fired a shot till he had picked out his victim, and not then till the muzzle of his Winchester rifle nearly touched the side of the quarry. Handled in this way, every bullet had its billet, and by the time the huge herd finally passed into the Bad Lands, and were lost to view, the valley was full of carcasses, of which Slocum felt proudly that one had fallen to every shot that he himself had fired.

Then he found himself in the midst of a frantic, yelling crowd of Indians, stripped for their work, covered with blood from the buffalo, and coming racing down toward him, howling like demons as they saw his white skin.

For one moment his nerve shook, for Bat Richards had vanished from sight.

The next, he set his teeth, with determination not to be cowed by them if they were only testing his courage, and pulling up his horse, faced them boldly and made the sign of the "Black Cloud."

The effect was not what he expected.

If any of the newcomers recognized it, they paid no attention to it, but came racing on harder than ever, yelling:

"Hi! yip! yip! yip! HI YAH!! HI YAH!!"

Indeed it was an appalling sight to a man who had seen their cruelties in battle, but the young surveyor was strung up to a pitch of nervous excitement in which he had become perfectly reckless, and he brandished his rifle, echoing the yell, and met the foremost Indian with a blow of the stock that would have knocked the savage off his horse, had he not dodged over, hanging by one arm and leg with a taunting laugh.

The next moment Slocum was set upon by a dozen warriors, clutching at him with their open hands, and two of them seized him from behind unawares, and pulled him off his beast with a swing, as easily as if he had been a child, carrying him off, full speed.

Then there was a wild chorus of yells and triumphant laughter, in the midst of which he was dropped to the earth, sent rolling headlong, while the wild hunters raced after him and

clutched at him as they passed, leaning from the saddle.

Then he began to comprehend they were only making game of him, for no one had drawn a weapon on him, and to show that he also understood the game, he lay as flat as he could, to make the exploit of picking him up the more difficult.

For all that, the very first pair of men that swooped over him caught him up and swung him across the saddle-bow of the left-hand Indian, when he immediately turned in the saddle, clutched his captor in his turn, and pulled him off his horse, so that they rolled on the ground together.

A howl of delight showed that the act was appreciated, and Slocum, who was a good boxer, gave his captor a crack in the eye that broke his hold, then sprang up and ran to the pony, that had halted the moment its master fell.

With an active bound he reached it and swung himself into the saddle, then waved his hand with a shout and dashed off, followed by the Indians, yelling with laughter.

He began to realize that their seemingly ferocious yells were only part of their rough play, most of which was evidence of their joy at the success of the fall hunt.

Away they went after him, and he turned and wound his way through the midst of them, evading their grip and every now and then sweeping an Indian back over the croup of his pony.

He found that he was far stronger than most of the Indians he met, being a six-footer and a trained gymnast, though he had never had any experience in the peculiar sports of the Sioux.

At last he had threaded his way clear through the whole gang, when he saw before him, in the valley, Bat Richards, riding slowly toward him, in company with an Indian who did not seem to have been in the hunt at all, for he was wrapped in a long painted buffalo-robe and wore on his head a lofty crest of eagle-plumes.

No sooner did the young surveyor see his friend, than he made toward him; while the dignified Indian by Bat's side raised his head with a slight repellent gesture, which seemed to be completely understood; for the rush behind Slocum instantly ceased, and he was left alone.

Then he rode up to Bat, expecting to be greeted politely, and made the sign of the Order to the dignified chief.

It was instantly returned, and to his surprise he was addressed in French, with the same Canadian accent as that shown in Bat's talk.

"You have done wrong, brother," said the dignified Indian. "You have not trusted to the Black Cloud, and you have struck a brother in the face."

His tone was stern and harsh, and he continued in the same way:

"You say you come from the rising sun to teach us the mysteries of the Cloud. You will find you have much to learn yet. How shall we know you are not a spy, come to help our foes?"

Slocum had come prepared for this. He knew that the Indian Order, in imitation of Masonry, had adopted various emblematic degrees, into all of which, but one, had he been duly initiated, among his friends the Mohawks.

That one degree was said to be in the possession of only three men in America, one of them being the head survivor of the Six Nations of ancient fame; the other two unknown.

The only bar to Slocum's success in his quest for the missing field-book, lay in his want of ability to gain the confidence of the chiefs, and the only bar to this latter was the possibility that one of the two men who held the higher degree lived among the Sioux.

This he could hardly believe possible; for the reason that the taking of this degree involved the possession of a knowledge of reading and writing, as he had heard, and of some other accomplishments difficult to acquire in the case of an Indian.

He answered the question of the dignified Indian by saying boldly:

"Test me and see. The Horse Chief is a brother, of a lower rank than I."

The Indian fixed his eyes upon Slocum, and made the sign of one of the lower degrees, asking:

"Why do we place our hands thus on entering the lodge?"

Slocum answered him readily, and gave him back a question in a higher degree to which the dignified Indian answered:

"That too I know; but cannot answer in the presence of a brother who is not a chief in the order."

Bat Richards instantly took the hint and rode away, when the strange Indian answered Slocum's signal, retorted with another in a higher grade, and carried him up to the limit of his knowledge, in less than five minutes.

Then the Indian looked the white man in the eye, and asked:

"What is the crown of all?"

As he spoke he made a circle of his forefinger round his head.

Slocum colored deeply and was forced to answer that he did not know.

The strange Indian allowed a grave smile to cross his face as he said:

"Then you are my son, not my brother, and bound to obedience. Dismount from your horse; go into the plain; lie down, and trust to the mercy of the brethren. I have spoken."

The young man knew that in the rules of this Indian Order, as in the allied branches of Masonry, the strictest obedience was required of the member, to be rendered to those above him in degree, when commanded according to the rules, and he saw that the Indian was only trying him.

With a gesture of respect, he sprang from his horse, advanced to the midst of the plain between his commander and the body of hunters, and threw himself down on his face.

He heard the chief call out some orders in an unknown tongue; which was followed by a tremendous yell from the Indians, who came swooping down on him, firing pistols as they came. He heard the bullets whistle by his head and body, felt the sting of the dirt knocked over him, but tried hard to control his nerves, and lay still, his heart beating rapidly.

Then the rapid patter of feet came nearer and nearer, with the incessant cracking of fire-arms, and he felt himself unable to lie where he was.

In a desperate state of excitement he rolled over on his back, and saw the whole body of the hunters close on him, the men leaning over from their saddles and firing at him, as if determined to kill him, for there was no mistaking the murderous look of their faces.

At the head of all, on Major Ireland's big roan, came Bat Richards, who had outstripped the rest by a length.

Slocum heard him yell:

"*Ne bougez pas! Ne bougez pas!*" (Don't budge! don't budge!)

Then he saw the half-breed, when just over him, set his teeth, make a dive from the saddle, and clutch him.

The next moment he was swung up, single-handed, by Bat, in front of the saddle, and the big roan scoured away like an antelope, under his double load, followed by a yell of admiration from the hunters, who ceased firing, and gave up the chase forthwith.

"It was just in time I picked you up," remarked the half-breed, when he had slackened his pace. "They would have killed you!"

CHAPTER XVII. THE INDIAN CAMP.

As he spoke, they came up to the dignified Indian, who still sat on his pony, stoical as a statue, Slocum's black horse cropping the grass by his side.

"*Monsieur le Taureau Seant*," said Bat politely, "*j'ai sauve notre frere. Il va obeir désormais vos ordres.*"

Slocum was astounded as he looked at the quiet Indian, who carried not so much as a knife.

Bat had said:

"My lord the Sitting Bull, I have saved our brother. He will henceforth obey your orders."

The quiet Indian, with the grave, dignified face, was the great Sitting Bull, the Sioux Napoleon, who had driven back General Chester's column and stopped the progress of the Northern Pacific Railroad, besides being destined to achieve greater fame yet, in a later year.

And this was Sitting Bull!

Slocum could hardly believe his eyes. He had heard of Sitting Bull as a great warrior, and had expected to find a brutal-looking giant, with a whole arsenal of weapons in his belt, like Powder Face.

Instead of that, he beheld a man of medium height, with a gentle, quiet look; features rather small than prominent, with nothing about him but an air of authority to denote that he was anything out of the common.

His eyes were keen, to be sure, but not so keen as those of many a young-warrior, and his bare arms were straight and by no means muscular.

His mouth wore a gentle, woman-like smile, and the jaw was rather small than otherwise, though it had a way of closing that denoted a good deal of firmness on occasion.

And this was Sitting Bull, smiling and gentle, talking French like a native, and unarmed!

His dress was rather plain for an Indian, and the only marks of rank about him lay in the circlet of eagle-feathers on his head.

In his girdle was not so much as a knife, only a small bag made of the skin of an ocelot, which hung on the right side, while he held a pipe in his hand, ornamented with the scarlet feathers of the sacred "medicine bird."

Slocum, as soon as he recovered from his astonishment, said, as politely as if he were addressing a gentleman at home:

"I am charmed to meet the Sitting Bull, and hope to have the honor of his friendship."

Sitting Bull waved his hand.

"That is for the future to determine, monsieur. You belong to a race that is driving mine to the wall so fast that we have not much more room to turn ourselves. You have come here, thinking to find ignorant savages, and have found your mistake. Do you yet know the crown of all our Order, the last secret of the Black Cloud? I think not."

Slocum did not quite like his way.

Evidently Sitting Bull was a man of superior intelligence to those around him, but how much did he know?

French was nothing. He had known Indians who talked English well, and yet were but ignorant men. He must be on his guard.

After all, he had no fear of his ability to outwit the Indian in a contest of brain against brain. He was a civilized man, and Sitting Bull only a savage.

With these thoughts in his mind, he assumed his most smiling air, observing:

"If, as I apprehend, you are one of the three men in whose hands rests that secret, I am a humble disciple to you. I came here to see with my own eyes whether the Brothers of the Black Cloud are prospering."

"And for no other purpose?" asked Sitting Bull, keenly eying him.

But Slocum, now that he had recovered his coolness, had his nerves in control.

"For no other purpose," he answered. "I know that my mentor, Pe-to-pe-kiss, head chief of the Six Nations, made two brothers of his inner circle, when he was here twenty years since. You are one, it seems, but I know not the other. I am desirous of becoming a fourth."

Sitting Bull looked at him in the same penetrating way.

The young man had got off the horse in front of Bat, and was standing at the chief's saddle-bow, looking up.

"Why did you not ask Petopekiss?" asked the Sioux chief sternly. "He could have given the degree had he wished."

"I have asked him; but he has always told me that I was too young, and I have not seen him for a year past."

"Yet you told our brother he sent you," was the instant reply, indicating Bat.

Slocum nodded his head.

"That is true; but I doubt if I could prove it to you, because his authority is written in Latin. It is here."

He felt in the secret pouch of his double girdle and produced a small piece of folded parchment, which he handed to Sitting Bull.

It was written in the clumsy, monkish Latin taught in French-Canadian schools by the priests; his mentor, the Mohawk chief, having received his education in Lower Canada, like many other rich Indians of the East.

To his surprise Sitting Bull took the parchment, glanced over it, and read it aloud.

This wonderful Indian understood Latin, and Slocum felt as if he could hardly believe his senses.

Sitting Bull perused the parchment with perfect gravity, and then returned it with the observation, in a more gracious tone:

"You are entitled to visit our lodge, and none shall hinder you. So long as you are faithful to the Black Cloud, the brethren will be faithful to you. But to know the higher mystery is not for one of your race. That is reserved for one of the true blood."

Slocum felt disappointed.

"Do you mean that no white man has ever attained it?"

The chief smiled gravely.

"One did, but it was long ago, in the days when our people in the East lived in the forest. He was adopted one of us, and as I have heard, warred against your people a hundred years ago at a place called Wyoming."

"Was his name Sir William Johnson?" asked Slocum, remembering that singular character, half feudal baron, half savage, who had been so distinguished among the Tories.

Sitting Bull shrugged his shoulders:

"It is not for me to say. I am a savage who lives by the hunt, and cares not for the learning of books, though once I knew as much as some. We call him the White Father Chief, and revere his name, together with Thayendanegea."

"Thayendanegea! Brant! Have you heard of him, too?" asked Slocum, still more astonished, for it upset all his preconceived notions of Indian savagery to find a Sioux who had a knowledge of history, even of his own race.

Sitting Bull smiled rather scornfully.

"You are too curious, my son, for one who has known what our race can do for itself. Have you never heard that a red-man was a trusted officer with your great father at Washington?"

"With the President?"

"Certainly."

"Yes. I've heard that Captain Parker, the head chief of one of the Six Nations, was on our President's staff in the war, and served as Indian Commissioner."

Sitting Bull nodded.

"You see we are not ignorant savages, all of us. Have you ever visited the Cherokee Nation, and read their books?"

Slocum shook his head.

"I've never been there, but I've read their books and newspapers. But that is nothing up here. These men are not like the Cherokees, who are civilized."

The chief threw up his head proudly.

"No, they are not. They live as lived their fathers, and defy the white man. When our time comes to live like Cherokees, we will sub-

mit; but until then, let the white man keep clear of us."

Slocum could not help pursuing the conversation, for there was a fascination about this singular man he could not account for, and he saw in Sitting Bull a man who could be argued with on a basis of civilized knowledge.

"But you must know," he said, "that the warfare can only end one way. For every white man you kill, the Government can send a thousand to take his place, and you must be hemmed in, within a few years, when the railroad advances."

Sitting Bull laid his finger on the young man's arm, and pointed to the north.

"Away in the land of the snow," said the savage chief slowly, "lies a fair country, where red-men and white are equal; and the White Mother over the sea makes all alike her children. The Echipeta, the Piegiens, have gone there, and the Nez Percés will follow. When our last hunting-grounds are ruined; when the peaceful ox takes the place of the maned buffalo; when the red warrior gives place to the cowboy, and no home is left to us here; there is a refuge yet with the White Mother. When that time comes, we will go there. Till then we will kill all we can. I have spoken. My brother is welcome to my lodge, and the Brothers of the Black Cloud shall make him welcome also."

He made a slight, imperious gesture to the young surveyor to mount, and added to Bat Richards, who had waited humbly by:

"Send for your goods. The white hunter shall not be hurt, unless he tries to leave the camp. In that case the dog-soldiers will teach him the rules."

Slocum felt relieved when he heard the order, for he had begun to feel serious doubt as to the safety of Montana George, in the midst of the Sioux hunting-parties.

But Richards went away, and the young surveyor, feeling decidedly nervous and ill at ease, in spite of his success so far, followed the Sioux chief through the midst of a crowd of squaws, who were skinning and cutting up the buffalo slain in the hunt.

Sitting Bull rode slowly and with lordly indifference through the crowd, never deigning a glance at the women, who were chattering over their work and casting curious glances at the white man whom they saw in such close communion with the renowned chief.

They passed on up the valley and followed its windings for several miles, till they turned the corner of a wooded bluff, and Seth Slocum for the first time in his life saw a large Indian camp, undisturbed by enemies, and in full tide of life.

Several hundred teepees were scattered irregularly along the northern bank of the river in a lovely spot, sheltered from the cold winds so soon to come.

They were disposed in little clumps belonging to the different bands, and in each band stood a large lodge with a lance stuck in the ground before it, feathered all along the shaft and supporting a shield festooned with scalp-locks, and belonging to the chief of the band or family.

As they passed through, Sitting Bull with the grave courtesy of a host showing a guest over his place, pointed out the different bands to his companion, saying in French:

"These are the Bois Brûlés; yonder are the Arapahoes; these are Cheyennes; those under the bluff are Tetons; the band yonder are Yanktons; and these are my own Uncpapas."

The last band was the largest in the camp, comprising nearly a hundred lodges, many of them having low shelters of brush beside them, known as "wicky-ups" among plainsmen.

Standing beside the chief's lodge, between two of the bands, was a large tent of skins, somewhat resembling a marquee, and capable of holding several hundred people.

In front of it stood a row of poles crowned with flags, each flag adorned with the red feathers of the "medicine-bird," and Slocum recognized it at once as a similar erection to the one which he had seen among the Mohawks at their annual festivals, known as the great "Medicine Lodge."

As they passed it, the chief said: "The Brothers of the Black Cloud will meet there to-night. See that you are prepared to answer questions before all. We keep the sacred fire alive, and death is the doom of the man who cannot maintain his place. This is my lodge. Enter."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER DE SMEDT.

THE farther Seth Slocum advanced on his perilous quest, the more was he impressed with the insecurity of his position among the Indians.

There was an ominous something in the air of Sitting Bull, in the gravely averted glances of every Indian he met that showed him he was far from being trusted yet.

The constant warning language of the chief led him to expect a severe and searching examination when the brothers of the Order met at night, and he had sufficient penetration to see

that these wild Indians were very different men from the semi-civilized Mohawks and Senecas of the New York reservation, whom he had been accustomed to think of as representative Indians.

But for the proud prospect that lay before him if he succeeded in carrying off the precious field-book on which so much depended he would have wished himself safe back in Gladstone.

But he was too far advanced now to go back, and he set himself to rack his memory for every word and phrase of the ritual of the Order in which he had been instructed, modelled, like that of most secret orders, on Masonic lines.

He had received his original initiation in the Mohawk tongue, with which, as a child, he had become familiar, and later in French, common to the Canadian Indians and those of the Hudson's Bay Territory.

It was in French that he expected to be catechised, and he was racking his brain to get his answers correct, sitting in the corner of the great chief's lodge, with the squaws around him at their various occupations, when he heard the tones of a cultivated, educated voice at the open doorway, saying, in French:

"*Dieu te benisse, mon fils. Ou est cet étranger dont on me parle?*" (God bless thee, my son. Where is this stranger of whom they speak to me?)

It was to Sitting Bull the question was addressed, and Slocum heard him reply:

"He is in my lodge, father, and safe if he answers the questions to-night. If he falters, you know the rule."

Slocum looked up and saw the form of an old man, white haired and closely shaven, dressed in the dark cassock of a Catholic priest.

"Father de Smedt," he thought at once.

The old priest had a singularly kind and benevolent face, and his voice was as gentle as a woman's as he answered:

"You know, my son, that the Holy Church sanctions no secret societies, and I cannot assent to any rules that call down bloody vengeance on a man that has done no harm to any."

The Indian shrugged his shoulders slightly as he replied:

"The customs of our people are one, and those of yours are another, father. We have a custom, and it says that if a traitor enter our lodges with a double face and a false tongue he dies."

The old priest bowed his head with a deprecating smile.

"And we have a book, come from the Great Spirit, which says: love your foes. Do good to them that hate you. But I do not argue with my children. I can only tell them what is right, and if they will not heed my words theirs is the blame before the Great Spirit. May I see the stranger?"

Sitting Bull bowed his head.

"May I speak with him alone?"

Slocum waited anxiously for the reply.

Sitting Bull looked up at the priest, and there was a tone of warning in his voice as he answered:

"Why should you see him alone? It is not necessary."

"I ask to do so, nevertheless," returned Father de Smedt, quietly.

The chief appeared to hesitate for a little while, and Slocum was surprised to see that he was uneasy.

The lord of the encampment looked sullen and rebellious under the eye of the quiet priest, but it was easy to see that he was under the influence of Father de Smedt, for he tried to evade the missionary's eye as he answered:

"I do not see why you should. Do you wish to help him to escape?"

Father de Smedt drew himself up with the first emotion he had yet displayed.

"Have I shown that I am your foe?" he asked with a quiet severity that proved his utter fearlessness. "I have lived among your people for how long that I should now be asked such a question as that? If you have sworn to kill a prisoner, have I interfered with you? You know better. I have told you often that it is not for this life I labor, but the next. Torments endure but for an hour, but the life of the next world is forever. I desire to see this stranger and prepare him for the world to come, if so he fail to satisfy your people in this. Can I go in or not?"

Sitting Bull listened with averted head, and his tone was one of grumbling acquiescence as he answered:

"You have the liberty of the camp. Give your word as a priest that he shall not be allowed to escape, and you can take him where you will."

Father de Smedt made the sign of the cross over the Indian's forehead.

"I accept the trust. He shall be brought back to this lodge before sunset."

Then he looked into the lodge and beckoned to Slocum, saying in English:

"Come here, monsieur. I would speak with you a little. Are you a Catholic?"

Slocum rose and greeted the priest politely.

"I am not, father; but I hope I am a fair sort of a Christian."

Father de Smedt looked at him with some curiosity as he advanced, and replied:

"I hope so too, my son; for ours is the only religion that can sustain a man in the trials about to befall you."

Sitting Bull did not look up from the place where he was sitting at the door of the lodge; but Slocum, obeying the priest's signal, accompanied him from the place and walked out into the camp. Not fifty yards from the lodge, he saw the teepee of Bat Richards, and Montana George was seated before it on a stone, in an attitude of deep dejection, his weapons taken from him; while the half-breed, dressed up in all the Indian finery of which he was possessed, was standing by the lodge door, the center of a group of warriors with whom he was conversing in the silent sign language of the plains.

As they passed the lodge, Montana George looked up at Slocum in a despairing way, and rose from his seat to say:

"Oh, Mr. Slocum, I knowed this would end in bad. The devils are as sweet as honey, now they've got us. They'll roast us alive. You'll see. Oh what a fool I was to come here with you."

The man, generally a brave, determined fellow, seemed to be completely demoralized, and Slocum asked him:

"What's the matter, George? You have been the bravest of friends so far. What has happened to change you thus?"

Montana George cast a suspicious look at the priest, and answered:

"Never mind; you'll see. God forgive you for bribing me to come here. I don't know nothin' 'bout your Injun societies, and I don't want. If I'd knowed you was a squaw-man I'd never have come here. But you'll see some day what it'll all come to."

"What do you mean?" asked Slocum with some indignation. "Do you suppose I'm going to betray you?"

Montana laughed bitterly.

"I don't s'pose nothing, but don't you trust too much to your societies. Life's as sweet to me as it is to you, and don't you forget it neither. If I want to tell what I know, I can tell it."

Slocum looked him in the eye, and saw that the plainsman could not meet his glance squarely; while there was a wild, frenzied look about him that showed his reason was temporarily unbinged. The fact was that Montana George was frightened half to death, and had reason to be. He knew the Sioux well.

The young surveyor tried to soothe him by telling him:

"George, we have nothing to conceal. We came here to trade, and it's no one's business what we buy. You've no cause to fear if I am friends with the Indians; for we are bound together, as you know."

Montana George shook his head sullenly.

"That's all right of course. You're eddicated, and know how to talk. See if your eddication will get you out of this muss. I ain't much on French, but I kin tell when I hear Bat Richards telling folks what fun they'll have making a target of me. It's all right, but I know this. If they put me to the torture, I won't be the only one."

And with that he turned away and went to sit down on his stone, while the Indians, who had been watching the colloquy, began to talk to each other on their fingers, with great rapidity and marks of intense enjoyment of the joke of torturing George.

Father de Smedt had listened with the impressive gravity of a statue to the whole tirade of the uneducated plainsman, and now he plucked Slocum's arm and said:

"Come, my son, we have no time to waste."

The young man walked away with his conductor, passing through the midst of camp after camp, till they came to an open meadow by the river, beyond which the ponies were herded.

Everywhere they passed, Slocum saw that furtive eyes were watching them; but no one offered any opposition to their progress, and the priest said nothing till they got to the meadow, out of earshot of anybody.

Then he took a seat on a rock, waved Slocum to another, and said:

"Do you speak French?"

"Yes, father," was the answer, in that tongue.

"I am glad of it, for my English is not easy from want of use. What have you come here for, my son?"

Slocum evaded the reply.

"Has not Sitting Bull told you?"

"I have not asked him."

"Has no one else told you?"

"Yes. The Horse Chief and Powder Face have said that you belong to the Indian Order of the Black Cloud. Is that true?"

"Certainly, father."

"And have you come here and put your head into the jaws of the bear, merely for love of a silly and superstitious ceremony? To be called a chief by a few savages in a dark lodge, and to exchange signs and words that mean nothing?"

Slocum was nettled at the scornful tone.

"I might retort on you; have you come here at peril of your life to mumble Latin prayers and have the pleasure of seeing a few ignorant savages bow their heads at the tinkle of a bell?" he retorted, angrily. "You are asking questions you have no right to ask, sir."

The priest smiled imperturbably. "I see I am right. You did not come here for any such purpose."

Slocum colored slightly. "You've no right to say any such thing, father. You are taking liberties with me. I am not confessing to you."

Father de Smedt sighed. "It might be better for you if you were, my son. The Church has consolations of which you do not dream."

"Perhaps it may have, father, but I am not asking for them."

"It is well, my son. I am sorry to see such a spirit in you; for, to tell the truth, I should be glad to help you."

"I must do that myself, father."

The priest shook his head.

"You are mistaken. You are the only man here who can, not help himself; and I the only one who can help you. What if I told you that I know for what you have come?"

"You would be a magician, father," said Slocum carelessly.

The priest raised his finger.

"You have revealed it, yourself."

"How so?"

"A moment since you said you came for the sake of curiosity, and this foolish and debasing mummerly you call a ritual. Now you say it takes a magician to find why you came. My son, you are afraid to confess it, and your life will be the forfeit."

CHAPTER XIX.

A KEEN CONFESSOR.

SLOCUM could not avoid being impressed by the acuteness of the priest; for he had never encountered a trained disputant of his kind before, and Father de Smedt was one of that famous Order of Jesus, which employs none but the finest minds in its service.

He tried to retract by saying:

"I mean that you'll have to be a magician to see into my mind, father."

"Oh, no, my son, that is not hard. I see before me a young man of varied education, who is not a soldier, and who has yet come into frightful danger for purposes of his own."

"For trade, for trade," interrupted Slocum, without ceremony. "Haven't I a right to want to make money, father?"

The priest looked at him with his penetrating eyes, saying quietly:

"My son, you did not come here to make money. You are not an Indian trader. I know them all well. You have the open brow and enthusiastic face of the student, but you are no student. You are not here to study language or habits. You are here for a purpose, and that purpose is the mine—ambition!"

"Like yours?" echoed Slocum.

"Like mine, but different. I have the ambition of my order, to advance its interests, and be praised by my chiefs. But you, what is your ambition? It is not hard to guess it."

"What is it then?" asked Slocum, in a spirit of bravado.

"You seek to recover something which was lost," said the priest, quietly. "It is of value to you; but none to these savages. Am I right?"

"That is not for me to say," returned the young engineer, striving to control his face.

Father de Smedt put up his forefinger again, as he said slowly:

"You have come to seek what was lost. I know well what it must be. It has reference to a survey that was being made when a man was killed. I have seen his watch: Sitting Bull has it. It is a chronometer, such as none but engineers wear. But that is not what you want."

"How do you know?" asked Slocum.

"Because you were not of kin to the dead man. Your name is known to us."

"I am not ashamed of it, father. Seth Slocum is my name. How did you know it?"

The priest smiled and held out to him a small pocket diary, which Slocum remembered to have had in his pocket when he stripped for the buffalo-hunt, but had not looked for when his clothes were brought back to him by one of Sitting Bull's squaws.

It was full of short-hand notes, and Slocum seized it eagerly, when the Jesuit observed in his smooth way:

"Stenography was one of my studies at the Propaganda, my son. You should not keep your notes so they can be read by others."

Slocum colored deeply. He had never thought of finding among the wild Sioux a man who understood short-hand, and he had written many things in his diary that would be sure to expose his secret, if read.

He concluded to speak boldly, and throw himself on the priest's generosity.

Turning on him, he said:

"Well, father, what have I come after? I promise to tell you, if you guess right."

"You have come," said the priest slowly, "in search of a book of engineering notes, that was

taken by the Indians when Engineer Samuel B. Graves was killed."

"Do you know where it is then?" asked Slocum, forgetting all caution.

"I do," was the answer.

"Will you tell me where it is?"

"Certainly."

"Where is it?"

"Safe with Sitting Bull, in his own medicine-box."

"Will you help me get it?"

"No."

The answer was short and decided.

"Why not?" asked Slocum, as boldly as before.

"Because my business is to save souls, not to recover goods captured in war."

"But this field-book is no good to them. I am willing to buy it of them, and pay all I have for it."

"Possibly," said the priest dryly, "but that is not the question now."

"What is, then?"

"Why do you want this book?" asked the priest.

Slocum hesitated.

"Because—because it completes a survey, and without it the work cannot be done."

"Why should it be done? There is work that should be performed, and oftentimes there is other work that might be better left undone, my son. Of which class is this?"

"Work that will benefit the world."

"What kind? Is it a railroad?"

"Yes. Make the most of that."

Father de Smedt looked at him earnestly for several seconds before he answered. He seemed to be struggling with some feeling that he was trying to repress.

At last he said slowly:

"My son, you think you are right; but the human heart, as you know, is deceitful and desperately wicked."

Slocum retorted rather sharply:

"Father de Smedt, my life is in your hands. If you choose to betray a white man to these red devils take the responsibility; but spare me any cant about religion."

The priest compressed his lips and was silent for another short space, during which he crossed himself and seemed to be undergoing another inward struggle.

When he spoke again he said:

"My son, I perceive that you are still in the bonds of iniquity. Bethink you that the Indian torture is sharp, and do not throw away any chance by insulting one who wishes to serve you. I am but a fallible man as a man, but in my office I should be sacred from insult at the hands of one who calls himself a Christian, as you did."

"I had no intention of insulting you," the young man replied more quietly. "But you must remember my position and not expect me to listen to homilies on religion, delivered by a man who is in league with Indians."

The priest bowed his head.

"Your reproach would be just, if I were in league with the Indians, but you must know that I am only their friend and teacher, trying to lead them, as I try to lead you into the right path. I do not wish to betray you to any one. Your secret is known to me and to the Sitting Bull."

Slocum could not repress a start.

"How does he know?"

"My son, the Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph, of the Nez Percés, were both sent as children to one of our schools, and learned the ways of the whites. As men, they have returned to their fathers' way of life, but they have not forgotten all of the past. Sitting Bull can read, and the nature of that book is plain on its face to any one who can."

"Then why did he not tax me with a design to get it back?"

The priest smiled.

"My son, the question is a foolish one. Sitting Bull is at war with your people and has you in his power."

Slocum bit his lips.

"You mean that he wishes to make me lie to him, and take that as a pretext to murder me in spite of the protection of the Order? Is that it?"

"You are good at divining, my son."

"Well, let him do as he pleases," said the young man doggedly. "I have played a desperate game. I knew it when I came here. If I lose it, I lose it; that's all. They shall never triumph over me."

The priest looked disturbed for the first time in the interview.

"You mean that you are prepared to commit suicide to escape torture. My son, would you rush into the presence of your Maker unprepared?"

"No father. I have prepared. Mind, I do not believe as you do. I come here on an errand that should commend itself to your sympathy as a civilized man. I come in the service of civilization, to harm no one. Look at this lovely valley, tenanted only by a miserable horde of squalid savages. I come in the van of progress, bringing with me the smiling grain-fields, the herdsman, the shepherd, to replace

the ferocious murderers around us. You call yourself the emissary of Christianity and you are on the side of the savage against me. It may suit your conscience, father, but I cannot see how you reason it out."

He spoke warmly and bitterly, but his words made no more impression on the priest than on a rock.

In the coldest tones he answered:

"My son, I have lived with these men for nigh forty years now. When I came to them first, your civilized men were not within a thousand miles of here. In all those forty years no Indian ever gave me an insult or injury. They saw that I came to do them only kindness and that I asked nothing of them. You come, as you say, in the interests of civilization. How?"

Slocum hesitated a moment.

"By opening the country to settlement."

"For whose benefit?"

"For that of humanity."

"The Indians are men, are they not?"

"Yes, after a fashion."

"Have they not the same organs as you? Are they not men and women?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"And have they not owned the land they hold from time immemorial?"

"I don't know; they have. They fight with men of their own race."

"Then why do you not preach peace to them and show them its advantages?"

"Because it is not my business. I am not a missionary."

"You say truly. Well, then, tell me, to introduce this civilization of which you speak, will it not be necessary first to drive out these Indians from this valley?"

"No, we are willing to pay them for their lands, father."

"But suppose they do not want to sell them and prefer to keep them?"

"Then they must be forced. You do not surely expect fifty millions of civilized people to be checked by a handful of savages, do you?"

The priest smiled.

"Then you admit that your mission is a hostile one, that you desire to force these people against their will to give up their lands to others."

"Perhaps so," answered Slocum, in a reckless tone, for he began to feel that it made no difference how he answered the keen-witted priest.

Father de Smedt nodded and rose.

"You have showed me your design, my son. You are an enemy to the people of my flock, desiring their extirpation and the possession of their lands. You say you come in the interests of civilization yet your designs show that you come in the interest of unscrupulous robbers. I feel that I cannot interfere in your behalf. It would be taking the part of the Evil One. You have put your foot in the trap and must take the consequences. It is hard for me to say it, for you are young and my heart yearns over you, but my duty forbids me to listen to my heart or I should be an unworthy member of my order. We will return, if you please."

Slocum ground his teeth angrily. There was something in the attitude of the priest that he had never thought of. Full of the common Western prejudices against Indians as a species of wild beast, he had never realized that any educated person who knew them could have a different opinion and own them to be human beings.

He rose also, saying spitefully:

"As you please, father. You can give me over to the torture if you please. It will be like the practices of your church in former times when they had power."

The Jesuit's only reply was:

"You have your opinions, my son, and I cannot argue with you on points of history of which you are ignorant. But you are mistaken in one thing. I am not for you, but neither am I against you. Only you must take care of yourself. I have done with you."

Then they walked to Sitting Bull's lodge.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ORDEAL OF QUESTION.

As they entered the lodge the chief looked up inquiringly; but Father de Smedt made no comment on the interview, and merely took his leave as a courteous stranger.

Then Slocum sat down in his corner and collected his thoughts for the ordeal before him in the evening.

If the priest chose to betray all he knew to the Indians, nothing could save the young engineer.

But would he betray it?

Slocum could not be certain, but thought it likely. Father de Smedt seemed thoroughly to sympathize with the Indians, and as thoroughly to distrust the whites.

Seth Slocum was in a sufficiently downcast mood, when he heard his name pronounced, and saw Sitting Bull at the door of the lodge, beckoning him forth.

He obeyed the gesture, and the chief said to him in French:

"Come with me. I wish to speak to you."

Curious to know what was coming, the young man followed the chief out of the lodge and through the camp to the borders of the river, when Sitting Bull sat down and fixed his eyes on Slocum, saying:

"Be seated, if you are a friend. If you are a foe, stand up."

Slocum sat down on the ground at once, and the Sioux began:

"You have come here for a purpose. Have you told the father?"

Slocum shook his head. He had not told De Smedt, though the Jesuit had divined his mission.

The Sioux chief looked him full in the eye. "Monsieur, as you are aware, I have lived among your people, and learned to hate them; but you are different from the rest. You are young, and have not yet injured us. I offer you your life on a condition."

"Name it," was Slocum's only reply.

"Join our tribe; become one of us, and let all your knowledge be ours," said the chief, slowly.

"Behold, monsieur, I am not a fool as you think. I know well that this struggle can only end one way. I desire to throw out anchors, to save my people from extermination. I know that they are poor and ignorant, and that our foes are many. You are a member of our Order, and lack one step of the Supreme Mystery. Join us, and you shall be a prince like myself."

"I am desirous of joining you," said Slocum, feeling much relieved at this address. "I am a foe to none here."

"Then why do you come?" asked Sitting Bull, quick as a flash.

"To trade, as well as to behold how the Black Cloud prospers."

"Be it so. I will give you full value for all your goods," said Sitting Bull. "You shall go back rich and make a fortune, if you will."

"How?"

"By becoming our friend and spy, and being the man to bring us arms and ammunition. We need it, and the Government keeps a sharp lookout on the traders. You, as a man of the railroad, will not be suspected, and can be made useful to smuggle rifles and powder."

Slocum answered instantly:

"I shall be glad to help you; but I fear that they will not trust me any more."

"Why not?"

"Because I stole away from Gladstone in the night, and stampeded the horses of a whole scouting party, which are here."

Sitting Bull looked surprised.

"The Horse Chief told me nothing of this. How did it happen?"

He kept his eyes fixed on the young engineer while he told his story of the march, and when Slocum had finished Sitting Bull observed:

"I am glad you told me this. It makes a difference, for it makes you one of us, whether you will or no. You will prepare for the council to-night."

So saying, he rose and stalked back to his lodge, followed by Slocum, who knew not quite what to make of the change.

When they arrived there, the great iron pot, which hangs in every Indian lodge, was sending forth its most savory fumes, and the chief beckoned to Slocum, saying:

"My brother is hungry, and there is meat in my lodge. Enter and eat."

It was the first time he had extended any sort of an invitation, and Slocum was proportionately encouraged by the fact, for he could not but think that hospitality would not be extended to him, were further harm meant toward him.

He ate with the chief and quite a little crowd of warriors and hangers-on; for an Indian lodge is common property, and dead beats in an Indian camp are as common as at a country tavern.

By that time the sun was setting, and the clouds were gathering in the north, high and dark, with a faint southerly breeze blowing. Slocum saw one or two old Indians point to the north and make signs to each other that a storm was coming before long, but he had no time to think of it, as the hour for his ordeal approached.

As soon as it was dark, Sitting Bull said to him:

"Come, my brother, the council will assemble in the Great Medicine Tent. There you will meet all the brethren, and they will question you."

"I am ready," replied the young man, and he followed the chief to the temple of mystery. It stood by itself, between two of the bands, and was surrounded by a circle of guards, each having a little fire at his feet.

Sitting Bull went forward alone, and was admitted within the circle, when the young engineer followed.

He was instantly confronted by one of the guards, who called out in Sioux a question he did not understand, pointing a rifle at him as he spoke.

Slocum, without any hesitation, made the entrance sign of the Order, and pronounced the word in Mohawk, following it by the same word in French.

The Sioux guard hesitated a moment, but the

voice of Sitting Bull from within the circle called out some words, and the Indian threw up his rifle and made the sign of amity, extending his hand.

Slocum answered it with his own, and they exchanged the peculiar grip of the brethren of the Order, when the young man passed on, feeling that he had surmounted one peril.

Within the circle he met several other guards, of whom some challenged him in Sioux, others in French dialect, learned from the Canadian voyageurs and hunters who are still common in the Northwest.

All seemed to understand him when he answered in French, and he finally made his entrance into the Great Medicine Lodge, and took his stand in the midst of a circle of dark chiefs and warriors.

They were crowded round a ring less than twelve feet in diameter, from whence they radiated outward, closely packed in circles, to the edge of the tent, in twelve rows.

As the young man entered, he made a hasty computation that there were nearly five hundred people in the lodge, but he had no time to do more than glance at them, when Sitting Bull told him in French to take his post in the inner circle to be questioned.

He advanced therefore and took his stand, looking all round the circle, and finding every eye fixed on him in a keen watchful gaze that had nothing of the usual stare of an audience.

There was something in the glare that told him every man in that circle was an enemy, trying to pick some flaw in his conduct, and not one kindly glance met his.

However, he was used to meeting the Eastern Indians in their councils, and knew that they always affected this stony glare to intimidate new candidates, an element of practical joking pervading the Black Cloud Brotherhood, similar to the ways of all secret societies.

He therefore faced them boldly and began the speech he had prepared, telling them how he had come from their brethren in the East by the great lakes, and how pleased he was to see such a prosperous membership in the Order, with other soft words, to which red as well as white men are susceptible. He spoke in Canadian-French and seemed to be pretty fairly understood by most there. At the end of every sentence he paused, and saw that Sitting Bull and several other warriors were translating his words into the sign language as he went.

Having received all his instruction from Eastern Indians, who do not use this sign language he felt at a disadvantage in not knowing it more fully than he did, but continued his address till he came to the place where he asked to be examined, and, if found worthy, to be admitted as a visiting brother to the illustrious circle of the Black Cloud.

When he had finished there was a long silence, after which an Indian arose in the inner circle, and made a speech in Sioux, which Bat Richards translated into French, word by word, as it was given.

Slocum had not seen Bat among the rest when he entered, and only recognized him now by his voice, for all the Indians had their blankets over their heads, and he could only see their gleaming eyes and a little of the dark faces, so that all looked exactly alike.

The old Indian said:

"I am Standing Bull, who have taken as many white scalps as I have fingers and toes on my hands and feet. I have been a Brother of the Black Cloud since I first went on the war-path. I have met warriors of all Indian nations and we have spoken to each other as brothers; but never yet met I a white man that belonged to our Order. This white stranger does not speak our language. How can he be one of us? Let him tell us that?"

Slocum instantly answered him that he came from the East, where were many men who belonged to the Order who had never seen the plains, and where white men and red were equal in the Order. He wished to be examined.

Standing Bull gave a grunt as he listened and called aloud:

"Let the head medicine chief examine him then, and let the Horse Chief give us his answers as he makes them."

"I am ready," replied Slocum, as soon as the request was translated.

Forthwith Sitting Bull began questioning him in French, and Bat Richards repeated the substance of the examination in Sioux, till Slocum had answered all questions ever put to a candidate in the lower grades.

The further he advanced, the cooler he became, and he was satisfied, from the occasional emphatic grunts of the dark brethren around, that they were surprised at the clearness and precision of his answers.

As soon as the answers had progressed to a certain point, there was a general grunt of satisfaction; and, as if by one consent, nine-tenths of the Indians rose and came up to Slocum in single file, each offering his hand and saying in an emphatic way:

"How! How!"

This was to the young man the hardest part

of the ordeal, for the Indians were anything but clean, and the odor in the tent, closely packed with their bodies, was, by this time, fairly sickening.

He was sufficiently encouraged, however, by his success to stand it, and he noticed that each Indian, after giving the grip, filed out of the tent, leaving less than fifty men, all chiefs of bands, still squatting on the inner circles, never moving their heads or eyes.

No sooner was the tent cleared than the Sitting Bull gave some orders in Sioux, which resulted in the place being surrounded by a dark circle of Indian brothers of the lower degrees, acting as guards to prevent any intrusion from the camp; as, just before, the neophytes and apprentices of the Order had guarded the place for them out of earshot of what was going on.

Even Bat Richards was left outside, and the examination commenced in the higher degrees, before an audience of chiefs, of whom almost all seemed to understand more or less French.

In this examination Sitting Bull and Standing Bull officiated as examiners and interpreters to each other, and the success of the stranger was still more marked, the ritual being fresher in his memory.

When it was over, he had been taken through several more degrees, and all but five of the chiefs rose to depart, greeting him as they went.

The men of the last degree were Sitting Bull and four others Slocum had not yet seen.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NORTHER.

THE tent was closed again, and Sitting Bull said in French:

"Messieurs, we of the upper circle are now together. So far as the rules of the Order are concerned, I have already found that this gentleman answers all the requirements, and will vouch for him as a member, regularly entered. But to us, who know what is not revealed to the lower ranks of the Order, there is more than that needed. Brother Giraud, what think you?"

Slocum looked round him more carefully now, at the five men who were left.

Three of them were evidently of mixed blood, for they had not been able entirely to eradicate their beards.

The fourth was a young Indian of slender build and handsome boyish face, with dark, melting eyes like those of a girl.

The man addressed as Giraud—a short, very broad-shouldered half-breed—spoke in a thick Canadian patois:

"I think that we need to find why he came here! What say you, Canot?"

Another half-breed replied in the same tone and language:

"Why did he come here? Yes, why?"

"To see how the Order was getting on in this part of the world," said Slocum, boldly.

The three half-breeds grunted, and Canot retorted, gruffly:

"No need to come here to see that. You are not of us if you are a member. You are not the right color."

"What of that, if I can answer all the questions you put to me? Under your oath, you are bound to receive me," returned Slocum, as boldly as before.

Giraud allowed an ugly smile to contract his face as he replied:

"That is true, if the the answers are true, but how if they are false?"

"Then you must prove they are not true," answered Slocum. "I demand to be examined in your degree."

Sitting Bull spoke out:

"The brother demands an examination. He shall have it. Form the circle. Let Le Marmoset keep the door."

The handsome young Indian, who had not said a word, bowed and went to the tent door to see that no one approached, and the examination in the last degree was taken up with a merciless severity that compelled Slocum to tax his memory to the utmost, the ritual being long and very complicated and mystic.

Its general tenor was different to all the lower degrees, in that the member was obliged to profess great love of the red race and hatred of the white, and to anticipate with joy the time when all the whites should be exterminated.

To Slocum, who had learned it as an empty formula, the words had never sounded so fierce as now, when they were pronounced with earnestness and conviction by men whom he knew as the relentless foes of his race.

When the last ordeal was over, Sitting Bull look round and asked:

"What is the judgment, brothers?"

There was a deep silence.

He spoke again.

"What is the judgment, brothers? Is the stranger found worthy?"

Still no answer till he had repeated the question to each individually, when each man slowly and grudgingly said:

"He is worthy, if he has told truth."

Only Le Marmoset, when questioned, answered without qualification:

"He is found worthy."

Slocum cast a grateful glance at the boy when he spoke, and Sitting Bull pronounced the verdict:

"The brother from the East is found worthy, if he has told the truth. He will sit at our council-fire henceforth and be one of us. The circle is broken."

Then he extended his hand to Slocum, and one after another the five brothers of the inner circle gave him the grip and pronounced the words:

"Brother, you are welcome."

All spoke slowly and grudgingly save Le Marmoset, who smiled and uttered his welcome in a peculiarly soft and melodious tone, while the pressure of his hand was friendly and reassuring.

Then Sitting Bull said:

"The brother is free to go where he will in our camp, and to-morrow we will open the trade with him. I have said."

He stalked out of the tent, and Slocum took his departure to the lodge of his friend, Bat Richards.

As he came out he noticed that the black clouds had mounted to the zenith, and within a quarter of an hour from that time a tremendous storm of cold wind and sleet set in, which changed in a short time into snow, and sent every member of the camp into his or her lodge, to huddle together for warmth over the smoky embers of the little fires.

Within an hour the temperature had sunk to within a few degrees of zero, to judge from the feelings, and the hides of which the lodges were composed were froze hard as boards.

Only the shape of the lodges preserved them from being overturned; for the strength of the wind was something fearful, even under the shelter of the bluffs.

Slocum found Montana George next to him in the darkened lodge, and George whispered to him:

"A reg'lar norther. Now's our time to git, if you're a white man. If you're turnin' squawman, s'ay and see what'll happen to you, when they've got all they want."

It was the first time George had spoken to him since they parted in anger in the morning, and Slocum had wrapped himself in a buffalo-robe to get through the night as he best could, when he heard the plainsman's whisper close to his ear.

"Hush!" he answered, "Bat will hear you and betray us."

Montana George's answer, in the same whisper as before, was this:

"Say the word and we'll be one too many for Bat. Dead men tell no tales. He's sold us out and deserves death."

Slocum could not help admitting the truth of this last remark, but asked:

"How about the squaws? They would make a noise, wouldn't they?"

He had not noticed when he came in, who was in the lodge, it being dark, with only a few embers in the middle.

Montana George's answer electrified him, as the plainsman said:

"Ripple's gone back to her dad, and Red Feather's with me."

"And Bat?" asked Slocum, breathless.

"Bat's asleep, so sound he won't wake in a hurry. Red Feather gave him the dose in whisky, when he came in. I knowed a norther was coming."

Then Slocum remembered that he had had a bottle of laudanum in his baggage, and asked anxiously:

"Did you give him laudanum? How much, for heaven's sake?"

"'Bout a quarter of a pint," was the cool answer. "He didn't get all of it though."

"Why not?"

"Said it didn't taste right, and made Red Feather drink the rest."

Slocum started up into a sitting posture.

"Do you mean that they're poisoned?"

Montana George chuckled.

"Mighty nigh it. If you don't believe they're asleep, go shake 'em. But don't speak above your breath."

"Why not?"

"'Cause there's lodges all around us and ears is sharp."

The young engineer verified his companion's tale by throwing some dry buffalo-chips and bones on the fire. When the smoke ceased, and a little blaze started up, there lay Bat on his back, snoring loudly, with Red Feather beside him, both unmistakably so fast asleep that they submitted to pulling and pinching of considerable severity, with no symptoms of waking.

But Ripple and the baby were gone.

"How did Ripple come to go?" he asked.

"Got tired of Red Feather, I s'pose," was the answer. "Squaws change husbands whenever they've a mind to, and nothin's said about it. That's why Bat got drunk."

"Why?"

"'Cause his squaw shook him."

"But they seemed fond of each other."

"Ay, ay, he was fond of her, and a heap tender of the pappoose, but 'twarn't no use. Diddle was too good for the likes of him. Why,

she was old Sitting Bull's daughter. I didn't b'lieve it till we got here, but I seen it was true. Then, she went off on a visit to her family, as might be, and I reckon Bat knows she won't come back to him, while there's lots of young bucks wants to have her."

Slocum felt considerable excitement at this piece of news. He had been so much absorbed in his own perils and ordeals since he had been an inmate of Sitting Bull's lodge that he had almost forgotten all about George, whom he had left at the other end of the valley, when he had started in for the buffalo-hunt.

"Tell me, George," he said. "How came you here, unarmed?"

"Easy enough. You seen me stay by the squaws when they set up the lodge at the Bad Lands. I knowed the dog soldiers would give you all you wanted."

"Who are these dog soldiers you mean?"

"The hunters of the camp. Sitting Bull himself daresn't cross 'em too much, and they jest raise Cain if any one breaks the rules on 'em. I seen you a-ketchin' of it, and thought you was dead till I seen Bat scoop ye up. Then I knowed ye was safe."

"How did ye know?"

"'Cause that was the game. You'd broke their rules and he stood out to save ye. If he hedn't clutched ye when he did, they'd ha' cooked your goose, sure."

"But you said he had betrayed us. Why should he save my life?"

George laughed rather scornfully.

"There's ways of saving life that's worse than killing. S'pose they cut off yer arms and legs, one arter the other and sear the stumps with red-hot iron so ye wouldn't bleed to death, that ain't much to be thankful for; is it?"

Slocum shuddered slightly.

"I should say not."

"That's why Bat saved ye then. Oh, I know them half-breeds and Injuns. You've trusted him and he's jest sucked ye dry."

"How so?"

"He seen ye wanted sutbin' here, and he don't know what it is yet; but he seen that ye wanted it bad; and he's bound to make a good thing out of ye. He got ye to put out money in guns and cartridges, dead ag'in' the Government laws; he got ye to stampede Major Ireland's horses; and he's got ye here, he's sold ye to the Indians, sure."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure! You bat. I understand a good deal of their lingo, and heard him telling 'em."

"Telling them what?"

"How he'd fooled you into coming here, and that the rifles and ammunition would all be theirs now, if they wanted."

"You heard that? When?"

"This afternoon. Didn't you see him, tellin' it when I spoke to you, and that darned old black priest was a scowlin' at us?"

"I saw him making signs."

"That was his story, and they was all laughin' at ye."

"But you forget one thing, George."

"What's that, sir?"

"That since that time I've proved to them that I belong to their secret Order, and that every man in camp is my friend."

"I don't care 'bout that," returned George doggedly. "They ain't mine. The dog soldiers come and took away my weepens, and beat me like a dog, and I didn't dare resist, for I knowed that was all they wanted to get a chance at me. I ain't a-going to stay here and be made roast meat of for fun. I'm a-goin' to git out of this camp this night."

"But you'll freeze to death outside."

"So much the better. I won't feel them burning me then. I tell ye I'm a-going. If I stay here I'll be burnt sure. If I get out, I've a chance for my life, and that's worth a good deal nowadays. The Injins will bug their fires close, you bet; unless the stock stampedes, and it ain't likely to go out of shelter to-night."

So saying the hardy plainsman began to make his preparations to face the awful tempest outside by putting on extra clothing, and when he was ready asked:

"Well, are ye going or not?"

"No," said Slocum. "I came for the field-book of Mr. Graves and I go back with it or not at all."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIELD BOOK.

MONTANA GEORGE uttered an impatient curse.

"I tell ye this is our only chance. This norther will last three days, and not an Injun will stir out of his lodge till it's over. We kin git out and hide our trail till we're out of danger; but if ye stay here, ye'll be killed, sure!"

"I cannot go without the field-book," was Slocum's only reply.

"Will ye go if ye get it?" asked George sullenly.

"The moment I lay hands on it, I shall think of nothing but escape," answered the other.

"D'ye know where it is?"

"Father de Smedt says it's in Sitting Bull's

medicine-bag, and if so, there's no hope of my getting it till I gain his confidence."

"Gain his confidence! You're darned likely to do that. No, Mr. Slocum; there's only one way to do if you want to get out of this camp alive with that book."

"And what's that?"

"Steal it to-night, and run with it."

Slocum was struck by the advice.

"I swear I think you're right. But to get it, I must enter Sitting Bull's lodge. That is not a possible thing, I anticipate."

"You're right there; but ain't there no way in your darned Order to make him come to you?"

A thought struck Slocum.

"There is one way; but I fear it cannot be done to-night."

"What is it, sir? If it wants a man to do it, here I am."

"You could not do it. I must do it myself."

"What must you do?"

"I must go and tell Sitting Bull that Bat is sick, and ask him to come and see him. I shall also tell him you are missing; he will probably order a pursuit at once."

"No, he won't."

"Why not?"

"Because no Injun would stir out on a dark night like this. They believe that if they die in the dark they'll stay dark forever."

"Then you think he would not come out!"

"Sart'in, no. But I'll tell you what we kin do, if you're a mind to take your life in your hand—"

"Go on."

"We kin both go to Sitting Bull's lodge, and knife him as he sleeps," said George, coolly. "He's a medicine-chief, and they're allers alone, except for the squaws. If it was another chief's lodge we'd find a dozen bucks sleeping there, but he's sure to be alone."

"Stop," said Slocum; "I've another idea."

He began to hunt in his baggage, and soon rummaged out a bottle, saying:

"That's chloroform—"

He had only got that far when they heard a knocking at the flap of the lodge, and the object of their conversation himself put his head in and said in French:

"Where is the Horse Chief? What is that noise, brother?"

As he spoke he put aside the flap and walked inside, closing the entrance after him, while Slocum was too much amazed to say a word till the Sioux had taken a seat at the fire, and observed quietly:

"Monsieur Slocum, in our camps we go to bed in the dark, and don't sit up to talk. It is a cold night, but ears are open in the lodges of my people."

Montana George had thrown himself down by the fire at the first noise on the lodge-door; but Slocum still remained, overpowered by surprise, sitting up where he had been.

Sitting Bull had evidently come in to spy on him, in the midst of a norther, so severe that no one else would have dreamed of going out in it.

The chief's long hair was white with sleet and snow, in the short distance he had come from his own lodge, and his gayly-painted buffalo-robe was gathered closely around him, as he sat there on the other side of the fire, where he could see Slocum perfectly, and watch Montana George, whose pretended sleep evidently did not in the least deceive him.

As soon as Slocum recovered his coolness, which he did by a strong effort, he said:

"I was talking to the hunter who came here with me. He is afraid that your people will regard him as an enemy, and I have told him that he is my friend, and that the Brothers of the Black Cloud will not harm the friend of their brother."

The chief slowly raised his gleaming eyes and fixed them on Slocum.

"You made a mistake, monsieur. This man belongs to our enemies, and is therefore a fair prize. We do not go into your camps and expect mercy. He will be given over to the squaws for torture."

Slocum glanced over at George to see if he understood the speech, which was delivered in French, but the plainsman made no sign if he did, and the young man answered:

"Then I presume it is also possible that I myself am destined to the same agreeable occupation of providing amusement for your ladies, monsieur?"

Sitting Bull shook his head.

"Not unless you attempt to escape."

"And then?"

"In that case you would be held to have violated the oath of the Order, and we should of course punish you more severely than a mere common enemy."

The chief's tone was pitilessly cold. The thin varnish of civilization he had received in his early life had not sufficed to make him civil enough to veil his meaning in fine words.

Slocum smiled.

"You're very frank, monsieur."

"It is best I should be. I am not, like the rest of my people, a savage. I have learned

your ways and seen your great towns. I know well that you never came here for mere zeal for the Order. The crown of the degrees is one that you can never take, unless you fight against your own people to the death. You came here to find a book, which I carry with me all the time. My people think it is a great medicine. I know what it is, and what it is worth. Come, monsieur, this lout does not understand a word of French. Speak out. I know you come from some one to treat for the recovery of this book. I am quite willing to sell it for my price."

Slocum started slightly.

"Are you in earnest?"

"Why not? You do not suppose that I do not see what is coming as well as you? A railroad will be built through here, and my people in time will be compelled to give up their wild free life and turn farmers, herdsmen or beggars as they have done elsewhere. Well, when that time comes, I wish to secure a shelter for myself where I can do as I please. What will you give me for this book?"

Slocum hesitated. There was something in this strange man, half-Indian savage, half-educated sharper, that made him dread exposing his hand to Sitting Bull in any manner.

"What do you want for it?" he asked in return.

"For what?"

The question was keenly put at once, but the young engineer evaded the trap.

"For the article you are willing to sell, of course. I came here to trade for furs, and all sorts of Indian work."

"And what will you do with it when you have bought it, brother?"

"Keep it, of course."

"Why do you wish to keep it?"

"To remember you by, perhaps."

The Indian smiled slightly.

"You are a keen man, monsieur. How much do you offer?"

"How much do you ask?"

"I ask in the first place, a secure place for myself when this war is over, wherein I may reside in my own fashion."

"You cannot find that in these United States," said Slocum gravely. "If you have been in the East, you know it as well as I."

Sitting Bull nodded gravely.

"Very well, then, I can go across the line to the shelter of the white mother. Next, I want a promise of ten thousand head of cattle every year to feed my people when the buffalo are all swept away."

"You can have it, I make no doubt," the young engineer replied.

Sitting Bull leaned forward and touched his wrist, saying:

"How am I to know that I shall get it?"

Slocum was puzzled.

He had never expected to come to a regular bargain with the chief till after months or weeks of patient toil; but here came Sitting Bull to the lodge on his very first night in camp, in the middle of a northwester, to treat for a surrender or a bargain.

"How am I to know I shall get it?" the chief asked him, and Slocum, still suspecting a trap in every word, was casting about in his mind on what to say, when Bat Richards rolled over on his side with a snort, and Sitting Bull cried sharply:

"What's that? Is he drunk again? Have you any rum here?"

"Certainly," replied Slocum instantly, "the very best, great chief. Would you like to try it?"

The chief's only answer was to rise and go over to Bat Richards, whom he kicked in the side with his foot, saying:

"Dog, are you drunk again?"

In that moment Montana George drew up his feet for a spring and leaped on the Sioux chief from behind, throttling him in the approved style of the garrote, with all his force and muttering:

"Catch his legs; hold him tight!"

It needed no such injunctions to make Slocum rush to his help, and do as he was told.

Montana George's right forearm was pressed firmly against the "Adam's apple" of the Indian chief; the other arm being brought over to help it, and his whole strength was concentrated in the effort to throttle Sitting Bull.

For an instant the struggle was tremendous; but when Slocum joined in the assault, caught hold of the Indian's legs, and held them firmly hugged to his side so as to take away the purchase that the victim had before, the contest was soon over.

Sitting Bull could not utter a sound, his breath being completely stopped, and his struggles became fainter and fainter till they ceased altogether, and George whispered:

"I'm tuckered out, Mr. Slocum, but the varmint's gone under."

Then they laid him down and Slocum felt the chief's heart.

It was fluttering feebly, and he whispered:

"He's not dead."

"Turn him over then," said George in the same tone. "I'll fix him."

With that he looked about him for a weapon,

and spied in Bat Richards's belt a pair of revolvers.

He took one and deliberately hammered away at the back of the insensible man's head, blow after blow, with all his force, till Slocum stopped him, whispering:

"There, there, he's dead enough!"

Montana George shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. You don't know Injuns. What would kill a white man's only fun to them. He ain't dead yet, but I reckon he won't give us any more trouble to-night. Let's go through him and git."

"Hain't we better tie him and gag him, in case he comes to his senses?"

"Right there, boss; we'll do it."

For the next five minutes they were busy in cutting thongs off the buckskin dress of the insensible Sioux, and tying him so fast he could not by any possibility untie himself, if indeed he were alive.

Then Montana George stuffed a leather gag into his mouth, and observed:

"There! reckon he's safe now, if he does come to. Now, Mr. Slocum, git your book if it's thar, and we'll skip."

Slocum went through the equipments of the prostrate man, and hauled out his medicine-bag.

Sure enough, in the midst of the bag he felt the rectangular shape of the thing he sought, and finally drew forth the long-lost field-book, which he closely examined by the flickering light of the fire, and found to be the identical volume, still stained with poor Graves's blood.

He held out his hand to George.

"God bless you, George," he said. "One good white man's worth all the Indians on the plains, I think."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE NORTHER.

THE precious book was there, and to all appearance uninjured, though the cover was deeply stained with blood, which had soaked through some of the outer leaves and stuck them together.

Slocum hastily glanced over it, thrust it into his bosom inside his shirt, and then said to Montana George:

"Now I'm ready to go with you. What do you propose to do?"

"Skin out mighty lively, as soon as I've looked out a bit. Say, Mr. Slocum—"

"What is it?"

"We'll have to put on two suits of duds apiece, or we'll freeze to death."

"Why, it's not so cold in here."

"Put your nose outside though, and you'll find out if it ain't. Jest try."

The advice seemed good to Slocum, and he crept to the door and put his head out from behind the flap.

The lodge had been pitched as usual with the door to leeward, and the wind had but little effect on the flap.

Slocum peered out and saw nothing but a white wilderness of drifting snow, already ankle deep, though the norther had set in for less than an hour.

The snow was whizzing by, with a hissing sound, nearly horizontal; and the hoarse moaning of the wind through the branches of the trees under the bluff had an inexpressibly dismal sound.

The dark outlines of the lodges, bare on the leeward side, stood out distinctly against the white background, while all above was a dingy gray between the snow and darkness.

The young man peered all round, and even went outside the lodge to feel for himself the coldness and force of the wind.

As long as he was under the lee it did not seem so terribly cold; but as soon as he put his head out, the wind cut like a knife and the snow stung his face so sharply he could not stand it.

He returned into the teepee, and said to Montana George:

"It's a terrible night. We shall be frozen to death if we face it."

George had been busy in his absence with the packs, and now turned out some Indian hunting-shirts of buckskin, saying:

"I know that, Mr. Slocum; but you jest remember this: it's a choice for us between freezin' to death, with a chance to escape, and being burned alive with nary a chance. If we stay in this teepee till morning, Sitting Bull will be missed and salt won't save us. We've got to get up and dust, the best we know. See here, put on two of these Injun shirts and an extra pair of leggins; strip old Sitting Bull himself, fur that matter, and let the varmint freeze, if he ain't dead now. Here's gloves and moccasins, and all a man kin need to keep the cold out, and whisky besides. Anything to keep warm, but out of this we go in less than an hour or there'll be trouble."

"And when we get out, what then?"

Slocum asked the question as he was hurriedly dressing himself, and preparing for the struggle to come.

"I've thought of that and there's only one way I see."

"What's that?"

"We must git to the herd; and git it on the stampede, down the valley. Once started, every darned boss will run his legs off, trying to keep ahead of the wind, and the Injuns are likely to lose every head of stock they've got."

"But they have horse guards surely?"

"So they have, but you won't find no horse-guards out to-night. Every darned one will be hugging his lodge close, and no blame to him."

"But it will be a hard thing to get the horses to leave shelter; won't it?"

"You're right, it will, but we've got to do it, and I reckon we kin. The first thing is to git out, with all the weepens we kin lay claws on."

"There are none but Bat's pistols. They disarmed me, as well as you."

"That's nateral. Arter all, we don't want weepens so much as ye might think; for if they do ketch us, all the weepens we could carry won't help us. A pistol each won't be in the way, if Bat's got any of the cartridges round him."

But this, on examination of the snoring half-breed, they found not to be the case; and they were confronted with the certainty that all they would have to take them to the Missouri would be a pistol apiece, with exactly six shots in it. Then at last, bundled up in clothing enough to enable them to defy even the norther, with a handkerchief over each face, leaving only an opening for an eye to peer out, Montana George and Seth Slocum stole out of the teepee, and off through the soft powdery snow which was now nearly knee deep.

Closing the flap of the lodge they waded slowly off toward the direction where the herd lay, when Montana whispered:

"Look! Snow over."

Right ahead of them, in the northwest he saw a solitary star, under the edge of a dense black cloud, and the snow had already lost a great deal of its thickness, though the wind howled louder than ever.

"We've got to skip lively," muttered George.

"As soon as they know the light's come, some of 'em will be routing out the guards. Come on, Mr. Slocum. Yonder are the horses."

The place he referred to was under the shelter of the woods, where they saw a dark mass, and heard the snorting of the horses.

On they stole through the camp, the soft snow muffling their steps, while the howling of the norther drowned every other sound. As they went, neither could avoid apprehensive glances around them, to see if any one was stirring, but all was perfectly silent and not a figure could be seen.

The wind and snow were both in their faces, making vision ahead difficult and almost impossible, and so they struggled on till they reached the edge of the camp, where the force of the tempest compelled both men to pause and turn their backs to it.

The biting cold had not yet penetrated their thick leathern garments; but their faces felt as if human endurance was overtaxed in facing such an ordeal.

Nearly a minute they had to stand there, trying to summon courage again to face the blast, then turned again desperately and floundered on another hundred yards, when they saw a dark form, coming through the snow before the wind, leaping and plunging.

"It's one of the guards running for his lodge. Leave him to me," muttered George.

On they went, and as the plunging figure passed them, Montana George pretended to stumble in the path, caught hold of the Indian's legs, and upset him, with his head buried deep in the snow.

"Quick!" he muttered. "Give it him on the back of the head, Slocum, quick!"

Slocum drew his revolver and obeyed orders with such desperate strength that the unfortunate Indian lay still as a log after the first crack, when Montana George searched the prostrate figure eagerly for arms, finding to his great disappointment only a knife.

"It's only a boy," he said in a growling tone. "If he'd been a man he'd have had a pistol at least. He's safe now."

The short struggle had warmed them so that for a moment they had forgotten that the norther was still raging.

When they started on again it was blowing harder and fiercer than before, as the snow fell less thickly, and Slocum realized that it was growing colder and colder. On they struggled till they got under the shelter of the bluff and wood, when the wind left them, though they could still hear it howling through the tops of the trees above them.

A warm, damp atmosphere soon encircled them, with a thin mist that veiled objects near them, and they perceived that it came from the mass of ponies, several thousand in number, huddled together under shelter of the wood.

Cold as was the weather elsewhere, the heat from these bodies, huddled close together, trampling and crowding, was perceptible twenty feet away, while, close by, not even the horses on the outside felt cold to the touch.

They seemed to be rather alarmed and flighty than otherwise, and George whispered:

"Wind's going to change and drive 'em out."

and they know it. When it does they will make a break one way or the other."

"And what shall we do?" asked Slocum in the same tone, feeling a strange sense of mingled exultation and dread, as he looked at the prospect before them.

"We've got to git into the herd and be ready to go with 'em," said George, coolly. "You've b'en in one stampede already, but that was a fool to this one. Got a balter?"

"I've got the same thong I used before. It's been in my pocket ever since."

"It's all ye'll want, and not much use of that, once we git started, till they begin to break down."

Slocum surveyed the herd with some little dismay, saying:

"How shall we get into it?"

"I'll show ye," said George. "We haven't very much time to lose nuther, for here comes the stars. Look up now."

Slocum looked up, and sure enough, the black edge of the great cloud in which the norther had burst upon them stood like a wall overhead, clear and sharply defined, while outside of it the stars were blazing out with wonderful luster, though the wind roared louder then before.

Almost at the same instant a cool puff of wind came round the corner of the wood, where all had been a dead calm up to that moment.

The instinctive glance of the young surveyor sought for the North Star and found it, high in the sky, while the wind which had been north-by-east, was evidently shifting to the westward and increasing in coldness.

That first puff set all the horses to shivering and stamping, when Montana George cried out:

"No time to lose. Climb on somehow, and keep near the head of the herd."

With that, both men made a few steps backward, then a rush at the herd, and in two minutes more were seated in triumph on as many barebacked ponies, huddled closely by the rest.

They had hardly got there when another puff of wind came round the corner, this time icy cold, and all the ponies began to snort and plunge together, while a general shudder seemed to go through the herd.

Slocum glanced toward the Indian camp where all was still quiet, and the third puff came, settling into a steady blast, icy cold, that seemed to chill his very marrow within him.

In that moment came a wild squeal from the windward side of the herd, and ponies began to break off and gallop to the front.

"Now!" yelled Montana George.

Then came a trampling and squealing, followed by shrill yells from the Indian camp, as the men heard the horses and realized what was coming when it was too late to stop it.

Then out of the lodges came tumbling a crowd of wild figures, and came running and tripping, head-foremost, toward the herd; floundering in the drifts, but still coming on, waving their arms wildly, hoping to stop the stampede, but all in vain.

Slocum realized that their efforts must be in vain, for already scattered ponies from the windward side of the herd were dashing wildly past him, and the whole mass had begun to move, pushed on from the rear, neighing, squealing and kicking, all the way, as they moved.

Already they had moved past the main part of the camp, when the wild blast of the norther came, fiercer than before, and the whole herd broke into a trot and gallop, moving straight down wind.

Then came a howl from the Indians, and the stampede commenced in earnest, but not before a number of men had got to the ponies.

CHAPTER XXIV. THE WIND STAMPEDE.

ONCE fairly started, it did not take long for the stampede to develop its full force. No sooner had the frightened animals left the shelter of the woods, than they ran into the full power of the wind, and dashed blindly on, going down the valley, regardless of the windings of the river or projections of bluffs. Even a tree, standing in the way, was not heeded, and within the first five minutes Slocum saw horse after horse dash out its brains against such an inanimate obstacle, till the dead lay in piles in front of every tree and rock.

Whenever he got a chance to glance round, he saw that he and Montana George were not alone in the herd. More than a score of Indians had scrambled on the horses as they passed, and could now be seen striving to get to the head of the herd and turn it back, but without success.

Whether these Indians suspected the real facts of the case Slocum could not tell, and there was no one to ask, for Montana George was separated from him in the herd, and nothing could be said in the thunder of flying hoofs.

So the young engineer was content to hold his breath and hang on as best he might, as the herd swept on down the wind, quite regardless of the deep snow which moreover, seemed to have been all blown into the river, in the broader parts of the valley.

Within what seemed to him a minute, but must have been of course much longer, they

were out of sight of the camp, and had come out of range of the snow-cloud which had ushered in the norther, for the country ahead was only sprinkled with little patches of white, and these patches were only a few inches deep in places.

But the force of the wind and the cutting coldness increased every moment, and only the fact that they were running away from it made it even tolerable.

To have stood against it would have been an impossibility, and it made the speed of the stampeded herd nearly thirty miles an hour, as soon as they got fairly into its power.

Every leap of the ponies seemed to be made from a spring-board, and the animals were carried through the air at least six feet further than they intended at every bound, while their riders had to lean back to keep from being blown over the ponies' heads.

A strange effect followed the force of the wind, in that the horses with riders, having most surface to offer, found themselves forging ahead of the others, the riders actually carrying their animals with them, as they hugged them closely with their knees.

The amount of lift was imperceptible save by its effects, and Montana George, who had brought a blanket with him, in a roll round his body, managed to spread his, like a sail, behind him, and went ahead of the whole herd, leaning back against the wind like a skate sailor, his pony going on in long, lofty bounds, thirty feet or more at a stride.

Slocum saw him sailing off like a huge bat, and imitated his example, for the young man had, in a momentary impulse, taken Sitting Bull's painted robe as he left the camp, expecting to find it of service in the cold.

It was tied up in a bundle on his shoulders with leathern thongs, and he made shift to let it down to his waist, take a firm seat on it, and spread it partially to the wind.

The effect was immediate, for it seemed to him as if his pony began to fly, the moment it felt the sail, and he had to lean back at an angle of forty-five to the animal's tail to keep from being blown over its head.

After a few minutes' riding in this style, the sensation of flying became indescribably delightful, while Slocum found himself fast outstripping the rest of the herd and nearing Montana George, who still rode ahead of all.

Glancing back occasionally, the wind cut as fiercely as ever, and the dark mass of the herd could be seen rolling along the now bare valley, the landmarks all unfamiliar, showing that they had gone a great distance.

How long this lasted, Slocum could hardly tell; but it seemed as if the rush would never cease, while the dark figures of the Indians could be seen in the midst of the herd, riding near the head, but unable to stop or turn the tide of horses.

Hour after hour passed, and the sky was perfectly clear overhead, nearly black in its cloudless profundity, spangled with jewels that twinkled down on them, cold as ice.

The tremendous wind drove them on with its relentless force, and only the violent exercise they were undergoing, enabled them to resist the numbing influence of the cold air that sought every crevice.

The horses seemed as if they would never tire, from the way in which they tore on, and still down the broad Yellowstone valley they went driving, to the southeast.

At last, when Slocum began to wonder whether he were asleep or awake, in this so strange experience, he saw a dark line ahead of him, stretching across the level plain, and noticed that, somehow or other, they had got out of the valley, for there were no bluffs near them, and the river had vanished.

Where it had gone to seemed mysterious; but a moment's reflection convinced him that the stream must merely have changed its course, while their own lay, straight as an arrow, about southeast.

And what was the dark line ahead of them, directly in their course?

Patches of snow still sprinkled the level plain, and beyond the dark line lay quite a broad sheet of snow, as if the capricious cloud of the norther had shed another part of its contents there in passing; but the line in front of the snow was jet-black.

A thrill of horror ran through his veins as he realized that it must be one of the prairie cracks that go by the names *barrancas*, canyons and what not; but which are always precipitous and of unknown depth.

There was no turning aside.

The black line stretched directly across the path, as far as could be seen, on either side, and Slocum knew that the stampeded horses must inevitably go over it.

He saw Montana George, ahead of him, lean back and spread out his blanket on either side, till he looked more like a bat than ever.

George was going to try and leap it. How broad it was, none could tell in the dark; but Slocum realized that his only chance was to follow George's example.

The strength of the norther might just carry them over.

If it failed to do so, both would be dashed to pieces, unless the rift were much shallower than they had any reason to fear it must be.

Slocum leaned back over his pony's tail, spread out the painted robe of Sitting Bull to its full dimensions, so that it almost blew him off the animal's back, and uttered a wild yell, which increased the fright of the poor creature, so that it bounded higher than before.

The black line increased and yawned before them in a gulf of mystery that seemed to grow broader and broader, as they neared it with huge springs.

The wind had become a perfect hurricane, and the riders were lying back, almost on the tails of their animals, the icy air whistling past them as if they were standing still, so great was its speed.

"A hundred miles an hour, surely," thought Slocum, as he ground his teeth and leaned back against it.

Then came a patter of feet, light as the rustle of leaves, and Montana George on his pony, sprung into air and was carried over the vast abyss, like a bird or bat, with his blanket spread out on either side by his extended arms.

Slocum saw him going, gave a yell to his own pony, and the next moment found himself high in the air, really flying.

There was no mistake about it this time.

The force of the wind actually blew him and his companion over a gulf some fifty feet in diameter, as it seemed at a passing glance; and then on over the level prairie, hardly able to keep their seats or the horses' feet, driven along as resistlessly as dry leaves.

Whether the rest had got over the chasm they could not stop to inquire.

They had spread their sails and could not take them in without danger of being carried off their horses.

And in the hearts of both riders was a vague, shuddering sensation that to do that was to be dashed to pieces instantaneously.

So away they sailed over the prairie, the ponies hardly seeming to labor at all now, so much were they helped by the tremendous force of the wind, till before them rose a dark belt of woods, and they knew they had come to the course of another river, some tributary of the Yellowstone, in all probability.

They had not long to look at it before the wind drove them headlong into the midst of the wood, escaping, as if by a miracle, the trunks of the trees, and, crashing through the underbrush, tore them off their horses and sent them headlong down the sloping bank, the ponies tumbling after them.

By an instinct, Slocum, in falling, threw his arms over his head with the stout buffalo-robe round him, and found himself rolled over and over like a ball, till he was pitched into a thicket of tough brambles and mesquite bushes, where he lay still, in perfect calm at last.

Yes; he could hardly realize it, but when he managed to struggle out of the buffalo-robe in which he had been entangled, he found himself lying in a thicket under a densely wooded bank, completely sheltered from the wind, which was howling overhead, fiercer than ever. He was safe out of the norther at last. He struggled out and surveyed the prospect around him.

On one side a lofty bank, on the other, beneath him, a foaming river, on either hand dense wood and underbrush.

A crashing in the wood near him showed him his pony, that had just struggled to its feet, looking puzzled and scared.

The creature seemed to be glad of human companionship in the terrible elemental war around it, and nestled close to the young surveyor, who, on his part, was equally glad to see the horse.

Remembering that he might yet need its services again, he took out his leathern thongs and manufactured a rude bridle which he used to secure the pony, then set himself to find Montana George.

He had not far to go to look for him.

His first low call brought the answer:

"Hist! Don't talk."

He found his comrade in a thicket of brambles, and George whispered:

"They're coming, all that's left. Wind don't pick and choose, you bet. We're in a box, and we'll have to fight as soon as it's light. Keep close now. Maybe we'll have a chance. Listen, they're a-coming."

They were crouched under the shelter of bank and thickets, the cold no longer so piercing, now they were out of the wind. Their ponies, standing beside them, felt warm from the change, and were already beginning to crop the twigs of the cottonwood trees.

High overhead the norther howled, and every now and then they heard the crash of a falling tree, torn up by the roots and sent plunging through the underbrush.

Occasionally a small tree was torn up bodily and carried through the air like a bird, falling into the river, which, they could see from the glimmer of foam, was broad and shallow.

Then came a thundering of feet on the bluff above, and over the bank came crashing the stampeded ponies, all in a mass.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BULL BOAT.

THE two comrades, as soon as they heard the crashing above, leaped up and took post behind as many sturdy cottonwood trees, which sheltered them from the rush.

For several minutes the terrified ponies came tumbling down the bank, head over heels, and quite a number blundered into the river, to be carried away like corks by the rapid current.

Then the rush paused, and the animals that were left alive scrambled up and began to neigh to each other, as if congratulating themselves on their escape.

George and Slocum remained by their trees perfectly still, listening for human voices, and soon heard Indians calling to each other in the Sioux tongue.

Some of the herders assuredly had escaped and were in the wood.

George drew close to Slocum, whispering:

"They don't know who we are. I hear 'em."

"What are they saying?"

"Calling names and asking who's there."

"Then we'd better get out of the way."

"You're right there, and now's our only time while the noise is loud. We don't get another such chance. Keep your eyes skinned if we meet any one, and be ready to knock him on the head. We daresn't fire a shot. Only got twelve between us, and there's twenty of them easy."

They stole quietly off, away from the sound of voices, till they came to a hollow in the bank, where some enormous tree, whose top rose above the bank, had been torn up by the roots and now lay with its head in the river, the butt having excavated in its fall a cavern that was capable of holding two men.

"Hyar's our place," whispered George. "We kin hold 'em here, if anywhere. Oh, if we only had a couple of rifles! But they hain't got any nuther; that's one comfort."

"How do you know?"

"We'd ha' seen or heard from 'em! Hush! Hyar comes one. Sock it to him when he gets close enough."

The step of a man crackling among the dry sticks was audible, and they saw an Indian slouching along by the shore, between them and the river.

He did not see them, and had his face to the river which he was watching.

As he arrived opposite them a loud call from up the stream attracted his attention, and he turned round to call back some words in Sioux, which opened a loud interchange of calls, and finally led to another man coming up to join the first.

Neither was over ten feet away from the hollow in which crouched the white men, and Montana George had already drawn his pistol and held it clubbed for a blow, when the first Indian turned round and walked away, still calling, and the second followed him:

Outlined as they had been against the river, Slocum had noticed that both were unarmed, and whispered to George:

"What did they say?"

"Hunting for Sitting Bull," was the startling reply. "They must have see'd his robe on you and took you for him. They think he was blown into the river."

"What do you suppose they'll do?"

"Make a fire and stay out the norther."

"How long will it last?"

"Three days, I reckon. To-morrow will be the worst of it. The wind will get higher'n ever when the sun rises."

"Yes, I've heard signal service men say this is where all the cold in the Union comes from," said Slocum, thoughtfully.

"I begin to believe it, George."

"Cold! You bet your boots it's going to be cold, Mr. Slocum. It ain't nothing yet. It's only cold in the wind to-night, but when she gets good and going it won't make much difference where you are. It's going to be cold, even here, without a fire."

"Will the river freeze, think you?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"What river is this, do you suppose?"

George looked round doubtfully.

"If I warn't afraid of bein' called a fool, Mr. Slocum, I'd say 'twas the Little Missouri river. It's flowing that way."

"The Little Missouri! Why, that's nearly a hundred miles from where we were this evening."

"We've come a heap of a way, Mr. Slocum. Hst! keep still. What's that?"

A twinkling light in the underbrush, some little distance off, broadening into a flame, and settling into a regular camp-fire, round which gathered quite a little group of Indians.

Montana George rubbed his hands.

"They haven't the least idea we're here, or they wouldn't light that fire. Lucky it ain't daylight."

"Why?"

"Why! 'Cause they'll drop on us, fust pop, as soon as day dawns, if we let 'em."

"How can we prevent it?"

"There's only one way, Mr. Slocum."

The plainsman's tone was serious, and Slo-

cum saw him thoughtfully feeling the edge of his knife.

"We've got to wipe out those Injuns when they're asleep, or they'll wipe us out when they wake up."

Slocum shuddered slightly.

He had not yet, like his companion, become hardened to the shedding of blood, and it seemed to him terrible to think of killing men in their sleep, even Indians.

"Can't we do any other way?" he said.

Montana George pointed to the distant fire.

"Count how many there are," he said.

Slocum counted thirteen men, and spied pistols in the belts of four or five, the rest seeming to be unarmed.

"Couldn't we steal the arms of some of these men," he whispered, "and get away, after stampeding them?"

Montana George shook his head.

"You won't stampede 'em far. Remember that they won't leave this shelter anyhow, and no man fights like an Injun who's cornered. We've got to wipe 'em all out, or get wiped out ourselves, as I told ye."

Slocum eyed the Indians at the fire in a thoughtful way, saying:

"Suppose we could get away ourselves, do you think they would follow us?"

"Follow us? I reckon not, while this here norther blows; but we wouldn't be any better off ourselves."

"Why not?"

"'Cause we'd freeze to death, if we went out."

"Suppose we made a boat, and sailed off down the river, where should we come to?"

Montana George scratched his head.

"Come to? Why, Gladstone of course. But how are we to make a boat?"

"Why not take this robe of Sitting Bull, and make a bull-boat of it? There's plenty of wood for a frame."

Montana George made no answer for a moment. When he spoke, it was with an accent of sincere admiration.

"Mr. Slocum, you've got a head on you, fit to be a mountain-man, some day. That there robe's big enough to hold a dozen Injuns, at a pinch. I've see'd six go at a time, and think nothin' of it. Yes, if we could get a boat and keep from freezing, there's no saying but what we'd get the best of these cusses."

"George," said the young man earnestly, "I've only one ambition left, which is to get home safely with this book. If I get killed, take the book to Mr. Russell, and he'll make you independently rich."

"Why, how much is that book worth?" the plainsman asked curiously.

"There are subsidies in money and land-grants depending on that book, to the amount of ten millions of dollars, George. If Mr. Russell gets it, the money is safe; if not, all the money the company has spent so far will probably be thrown away. Now you see what the book's worth. You can ask what you please, if I'm killed, and I'll see you get all that you can desire, if I live through your efforts."

"S'pose I was to ask a couple of thousand dollars, and a pair of fust-class hosses," asked George doubtfully, "d'ye think they'd give it me, Mr. Slocum?"

"I think so, George, if they saw you had the right book."

George said no more; but sat watching the distant Indians, and listening to the howl of the norther overhead, till the noise of talk by the fire ceased, and one by one the Indian herders lay down to rest, quite exhausted by the night's work.

Most of the ponies had long ago done the same, very few retaining energy enough to crop the cottonwood twigs and bark, so that the sheltered bank of the river was very soon quiet, save for the moan of the wind above.

When all was still, and Slocum was about to nod, overcome with weariness, George touched his arm and said:

"They're fast, now. If ye want to make that bull-boat, now's the time. We got to work quick, and quiet, too, or it's all up. Hyar, I've only one knife. I cut—you weave."

They stole out of the hollow of the roots, and set to work at once.

George, with the Indian hunting-knife, cut down long, slender boughs from the hazel bushes which abounded, and Slocum wove them up, with long bramble creepers, into a sort of basket, shaped like half an egg, and strongly compacted.

He did it as he had seen it done before, by first making a row of arches, the ends of the sticks in the ground on either side, and then weaving thinner twigs in and out, till the structure was firmly framed.

He had to work with the utmost silence; for only the snorting of horses was there to keep the noise of his proceedings from the sharp ears of the Indians.

He well knew that the Indians sleep lightly, and that unusual noises, however slight, awaken them instantly to look for an enemy.

He could not hear Montana George cutting the sticks, so wary was the plainsman.

George would wait, with his hand on a withe,

till he saw a pony pulling at a twig, and make the snap of his own crack seem but a part of the noise made by the pony.

They worked on in this way till the basket was made, when Slocum looked toward the east and saw the red streaks of dawn.

He pointed it out to George, who said hastily: "Time we was off, then. They won't sleep arter it's light. Hurry on the hide."

"They took the famous painted robe of Sitting Bull, and spread it out on the ground, with the basket in the center."

When they wrapped it up and brought the ends in over the gunwale, they had a perfect boat of its kind—rather of a baggy kind—but quite capable of holding four or five people, and perfectly seamless.

They secured the edges by cutting thongs off the border of the skin and sewing it to the frame, and by that time the top of the sun peeped over the horizon, and the horses began to get up, stamp, and snort to each other.

"Now," said Montana George, "we've got 'em, Mr. Slocum, if they'll keep still jest three minutes, while I get a pole. Take her down behind the tree, and keep your eyes skinned for those cusses over there. If it comes to a fight, give it to 'em over the tree."

The plainsman stole away up the bank, and Slocum saw him cutting steadily away at the foot of a tall sapling, nearly two inches thick at the butt.

Montana George cut away with all his force, using the knife with both hands like a cooper's spoke-shave, and cutting round and round the tree, with marvelous rapidity.

At last he had got it cut nearly in half, and paused to glance over at the Indians by the fire.

No sooner had he done so than he uttered a cry of alarm, snapped off the sapling with a loud crack, and plunged down to the river, calling to Slocum as he went:

"Put her in! Hyar they come!"

At the same moment "crack! crack!" went a whole volley of pistols, and a dozen Sioux came running for the tree, yelling like a pack of wolves and firing as they came.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOWN-STREAM.

THE bull boat lay on the ground at the side of the tree, away from the Indians, and Slocum saw them coming in a bunch, all yelling together, as if wild with rage.

They had caught sight of George's white face, and seemed to realize what had happened.

The plainsman came plunging down the bank, still clinging to the sapling he had cut, and threw himself down behind the prostrate tree, saying breathlessly:

"Keep 'em busy while I trim the pole—ceax 'em to fire. Don't throw away a shot."

Slocum needed no warning on the point. He was naturally cool and cautious, and he thoroughly appreciated the fact that he had no reserve ammunition.

He saw the Indians rushing on, the men with pistols in front, firing as they came, and trusting to take everything with their first rush.

He kept himself well hidden behind the trunk of the huge tree, close to the butt, only the side of his head visible, till the foremost man made a leap on the great bole, as it lay.

Not till then did he fire his pistol, almost touching the Indian, who staggered and fell headlong, inside the barricade, stone dead.

That shot checked the rush instantly, and the rest hesitated, when Seth Slocum leveled his revolver over the tree, and shot down a second Indian, within six feet of the front of his fortification.

That turned the rush, and they ran like hares to cover, while Montana George, who was busy trimming his long pole, observed gleefully as he cut:

"Mr. Slocum, you was born for a plainsman. Couldn't ha' done better myself. We've made two revolvers out of that. Keep a look out, and I'll s'arch the dead one, when I get this pole trimmed."

Slocum remained on the watch, but saw no movement of the Indians for nearly a minute.

During all that time, the dead Indian in front of the barricade lay where he had fallen, on his face, a revolver in each hand, still clutched tightly.

Presently Montana George said in a low tone: "Thar, the pole will do, I reckon, and we made two pistols. Hooray! Hyar's a box of cartridges in the brute's belt. Now we're fixed. You watch, while I load up."

Slocum watched and caught sight of two Indians flitting from tree to tree, to get round to the flank of the fortification.

He told George:

"Give the next one a shot if you're sure you won't miss him," was the reply. "One hit's worth a million misses with Injuns. Watch the tree and pull the moment he sticks out his head."

Slocum followed the advice by watching a single tree through the sights of his pistol.

An Indian put out his head once and drew it back.

The next time it was protruded it remained

there for nearly a second of time, and Slocum pulled the trigger.

"Crack! Slap!"

He heard the bullet strike, and down went the Indian, while the rest raised a yell to cover their discomfiture.

At that moment Montana George said:

"Here's a pair, all loaded, Slocum, and there's four more cartridges left. Hand me the pistol and I'll fill him up."

Slocum reached out one hand; took the proffered pistols, and resumed his watch, while the plainsman was busy behind him in reloading the empty chambers of the weapon, that had already done such good service.

Presently Slocum heard behind him the grating of steps on the bank, and in a moment more George said:

"Now, if we can only draw their fire, we have a chance to scrape clear!"

"How shall we do it?" asked Slocum.

As he spoke he looked around, and saw that the plainsman had taken the bull boat to the water's edge, where it lay with the pole resting on it, all ready to launch.

Montana George stood beside him, behind the trunk, surveying the dead Indian in front of the barricade.

"How shall we draw their fire?" he asked.

"I'll show you, Mr. Slocum. Here, stick up old Injun here, and I'll make a dash."

So saying he stooped to the dead Indian inside the barricade, hauled him up, and transferred to the Sioux's head his own gray felt hat.

"Now stick him up," he said, "and yell like blazes afore you do it."

Slocum understood the ruse, and they both stooped behind under cover and began to yell loudly.

The yell was answered, and the two men rose and shoved up the dead Indian, as if he had made a leap.

The appearance of the gray hat was the signal for a volley, and they let the body fall forward over the tree, as if it had been struck by shots.

The fall was a signal for a general yell and rush, the Indians thinking they had only one foe left to dispose of.

"Pull him in," said George, and they hauled in the body again by the legs, as the foremost Indian was close to the tree.

Then both men rose suddenly within a few feet of their assailants, and blazed away with such cool precision that again the rush was checked, and two more Indians fell before the tree.

"Only nine left," said Montana George, as he coolly surveyed the bodies, "and every dead man's got his pistols. Mr. Slocum, ef we can find who's got any more, I vote we charge and scatter 'em."

"Try the scarecrow again," suggested Slocum.

"Sart'inly—don't cost nothin'," was the reply.

Again they hoisted the dead body, and again they drew a shot, this time a single one, and Slocum saw that it came from a man in advance of all the rest.

"There he is," he said. "Let's charge him!"

Montana George gave another yell, and ran out from behind the tree, dodging from side to side, and yelling, Slocum hard after him, a pistol in each hand.

As he had expected, the charge shook the nerve of the only Indian left who had a pistol, and he fired hastily and aimlessly, while neither of the white men pulled a trigger as they ran.

The result was that he missed both of his remaining shots and turned to run after his unarmed friends, when George halted, drew up his pistol over his left elbow, and fired a single shot.

That shot dropped the Indian.

"Back! back!" cried the plainsman, as soon as this was done. "They ain't dead yet; see the rest."

Slocum looked round and saw six men, with drawn knives, rushing to cut him off from the boat, that lay on the shore.

Back rushed he and George, flustered for the first time; for they knew how easy a thing it would be to ruin the boat by a single cut.

Shot after shot they fired, but the men with the knives rushed on like madmen. Every shot struck, but seemed to have no effect, unless the Indian received it in head or heart.

Slocum fired three shots directly into the breast of one young fellow, hardly more than a boy, without checking his rush in the least, and had to parry the thrust of the Indian's knife with his left-hand pistol, and use the other as a club, before any effect was produced.

Then the man stumbled and fell on his face his knife burying itself in the ground within a few inches of Slocum's foot, where he lay powerless at last.

Montana George received a light stab from another maniac, and before the white men got to the bull boat, the Indians had got to the dead bodies and were picking up the pistols.

"Get in," yelled George. "Got to take our chances now, best way we kin."

Slocum helped him shove off the bull boat; both leaped in, gave a shove with the pole, and sent the fragile craft whirling out into the stream, where it was seized and swept away at seven miles an hour, to become the target of the remaining pistols.

"Don't fire a shot," said George quickly, as Slocum leveled his weapon; "not a shot. They won't hit us. Show all you kin and keep movin'."

As for himself, he kept his body in constant motion from side to side, waving his arms, and bobbing his head, yelling all sorts of insulting epithets in Sioux, and encouraging the Indians to fire away their ammunition, which they proceeded to do with intense industry.

The bullets whistled over and on either side the canoe, and all round the men, but with such poor aim that neither was struck, and the rapidity with which the current carried them away soon took them from the reach of the bullets, but also into the full power of the wind in twenty seconds.

Keenly they felt it, after their short respite under the shelter of the bank.

The terrible norther caught them, and sent the bull boat drifting down the raging river, till George and Slocum spread the blanket, all that was left to them now.

Then the power of the tempest seemed to be about to lift them out of the water, and they went plowing and skipping along over the foaming tide, nearly carried out of the boat most of the time.

The cold cut them like a knife; but on they went, mile after mile passing rapidly away, till Montana George said to Slocum:

"Mr. Slocum, I reckon were safe out of the Sioux country now. There ain't many of the brutes left in these parts, and we'll be running on Uncle Sam's posts pretty soon."

"Is it safe to land yet?" asked Slocum, his voice weak and tremulous from the bitter coldness of the wind, which had at last penetrated even his double leathern garments, so that he felt numbed and ready to drop into the bottom of the boat.

Montana had been watching the banks narrowly for some minutes, and here he brightened up.

"Safe to land! Yes and no. It's safe from the Injuns, but 'tain't safe 'gainst nothen else."

"What else do you mean? soldiers?"

Montana George grinned.

"Ain't likely to be many sojers out now. They don't go out scoutin' in northers."

"Who then?"

"Waal, painters and grizzlies, and old buck elk, and sech. Every shelter's sure to be full of critters that hates the cold jest as much as me and you do, Mr. Slocum, so I reckon we'll have to fight for it."

"I'm ready to do anything, so long as I get to shelter somehow," responded Slocum, his teeth chattering in his head. "A little more, and you'll have to take in the book alone, George. I'm giving it up."

Montana George cast a glance of alarm at his companion, who looked pinched and blue, and then scanned the shore eagerly.

The boat was drifting under some bluffs, and the river was taking a turn that promised to bring them under shelter in a short time.

He pointed it out to Slocum who, at the news, livened up at once.

Five minutes later, he was helping with the pole to shove the boat across the rapid current to the shelter of the bluffs.

It was a hard task, for the current was very swift and the river full of rocks at that point; but the work helped them both to withstand the cold, and, after a fierce struggle, in which more than once they were sent whirling round and round and nearly capsized over rocks, the shallow little coracle in which they had journeyed so far grounded on a beach of pebbles in a recess of the river, and George said:

"Thank God, we're all right now at last!"

They could hardly stand for the numbness of their feet, but they were out of the cold, cruel wind, and Montana George drew up the boat on the shore, and rushed into a thicket, from which he emerged with the cheering news:

"Lots of deadwood round; have a fire in no time now. Got a match?"

In ten minutes later, he had redeemed his promise and the two sorely-tried comrades were basking before an enormous fire of dry branches, thorns and grass, that made a terrible blaze and threw out enough heat to roast an ox, while Montana George cried:

"Blaze away, old fire. Don't care if every Sioux in the nation sees ye now."

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

THEY had come to a bluff of the Little Missouri river which had fallen at one place into a densely wooded recess very similar to Squawman's Hole, below Gladstone.

The underbrush was dry as tinder and they had some difficulty in keeping the fire from spreading while the change in their sensations from bitter cold to grateful warmth was almost instant. As soon as they were fairly warmed Montana George observed:

"There's a sight of game in these hyar thickets, if we want to hunt it up, but I reckon we'd best not disturb it, unless we're sure we don't stir up the wrong fellers."

"What fellows? Bears?"

"Shouldn't wonder. Don't know how you feel, Mr. Slocum, but I don't feel much like tackling an old grizzly with these here little pops of pistols. They ain't bad things in a Injun scrimmage, but, Lord! a grizzly wouldn't mind 'em no more nor so many pea-shooters."

"In the meantime," remarked Slocum, "I'm exceedingly hungry. I ate only one meal yesterday and if I see anything I shall be tempted to shoot it."

It was the middle of the forenoon when he spoke, and the force of the wind seemed to be about stationary, while the recess in which they were facing the southeast was almost warm from the rays of the sun that shone full into it.

Slocum had hardly said "shoot it" when Montana George pointed up the bank.

There in the midst of the brushwood and looking curiously down at them, stood a magnificent buck elk, with a pair of grand branching horns.

His attitude was proud and noble and he tossed his antlers several times with a snort then deliberately came down the hill toward them.

"What does he want?" asked Slocum, full of admiration for the stately creature, but puzzled at its boldness.

Montana George had risen from the fireside and looked grave and serious.

"By gum, Mr. Slocum," he said, "I b'lieve the beast's coming fur us. I've heern tell they was dangerous this time of year, but I never b'lieved it. Get out yer pistol, but don't give it him till ye can put it behind his shoulder. Look out!"

The last exclamation was called forth by the antics of the buck, that had now come down to the beach and stood there pawing the ground, snorting and whistling, while he bowed his horns over and struck the pebbles violently, as much as to say:

"Look at that, now!"

"He's a-gittin' up his mad," remarked George sententiously. "He'll charge in a minute. You go one side, I'll take the other, and run in on him. If we don't, he's wusser'n a grizzly. Look out!"

Again the buck called forth a warning as, after lashing himself into a sufficiently savage mood, he uttered an angry snort and rushed straight at the two men.

It was touch and go but what he struck one with his huge horns.

Slocum came the nearest, for one of the times actually caught the skirt of one of his hunting-shirts, and ripped the tough buckskin as if it had been paper.

The next moment Slocum, not thinking of what he did, caught hold of the antlers with both hands and was tossed up in the air like a ball.

He hung on like grim death, and came down again with such force that only the elastic horn saved him from a fatal injury.

Then he managed to cling to the horns in such a way as to bring the buck's head close to the earth, trying to toss him up but unable to lift the weight a second time on account of the leverage, though it required all the man's strength to keep his perilous position.

Then he saw Montana George run in from the rear on the buck, put his pistol close to the beast's fore-shoulder and fire.

Crack!

The elk dropped instantly and lay still for several seconds, when George cried:

"Git to a tree; he isn't dead yet!"

Instinctively Slocum obeyed, and not a moment too soon.

The buck leaped up as if on steel springs at the sound of voices, and dashed after Montana George with a savage vehemence about which there was no mistake.

Montana ran and dodged his best, but the buck was too quick for him.

The great horns rose and fell, and some of the outermost times caught the fleeing plainsman on the shoulder and knocked him down.

In a moment the great buck was on him, rearing up and striking down with its fore-feet, bringing the huge horns down with a clash, while George shouted for help, and tried to shield himself in vain from the antlers.

Slocum, paralyzed at first by the sudden attack from an animal he had never before deemed specially dangerous, hesitated what to do, but the sight of his comrade's danger overcame his doubts, and he drew both pistols, and rushed in, firing into the buck's body shot after shot at less than six feet distance.

He had no time to fire three shots before the buck suddenly dropped again in the act of turning and fell over the body of Montana George, where it lay stone dead, to all appearance, though Slocum could hardly believe it at first.

Montana George lay panting and groaning: "Help, Mr. Slocum. By gosh, I b'lieve I'd have b'en dun fur if you hadn't come when you did. Haul him off."

Slocum took hold of the antlers, and this time there was no mistake, the great elk was dead as a door nail.

They got him laid out after George had been extricated with no worse hurt than clothes torn to rags, and measured him, estimating his body as big as an ordinary cow, while the horns were large enough to hold a six-footer between their tips.

They wasted very little sentiment over the animal, for both were very hungry, and set to work to skin and cut it up at once.

Slocum found his three bullet holes where he had fired them into the lungs and liver of the buck, and George observed:

"Darned strange those should kill him. I've knowed bucks carry away a bull grist of lead in the lungs and go never a bit worse for it. Reckon I'll look fur mine. It ought to be near the heart."

They cut into the cavity of the chest behind the shoulder, and found that the first shot fired by George had passed through the very middle of the elk's heart, yet the furious creature had leaped up and made a desperate fight for nearly a minute after.

"Now," said George, when this was settled, "this critter's got a doe somewhere near here, or he wouldn't ha' b'en so rambunctious about it. We don't want to look fur it. Buck venison's good enough fur me."

So saying, he cut off a steak from the yet warm carcass, and began to broil it over the fire, an example followed by Slocum, and great was their rejoicing over the unexpected feast furnished them by this belligerent buck.

They ate till their hunger was satiated, and then Slocum observed:

"If the wind would only go down, I should believe in getting into the boat again."

Montana George looked keenly up the course of the river and to windward.

"I d'n'o but what you're right," he said. "The Sioux must ha' found what we did to Sitting Bull by this time, and I reckon they ain't the boys to sit still norther or none."

"But they can't get down to us."

"Mebbe they can't, and mebbe they kin, Mr. Slocum. We've come down one river in a bull boat and I reckon 'twouldn't be much fur them to come down in another. If they do, look out fur trouble for they'll be wicked as blazes."

His prophecy proved true for that afternoon when the sun was sloping to the west and the wind was going down a dark speck was seen up the stream and soon developed into a bull boat of more elaborate construction than their own measuring over ten feet long, made of several hides and full of warriors with rifles.

Slocum saw it first and the two fugitives hastily took the skin of the slaughtered buck into the boat for warmth, a lot of cooked venison for food and pushed off into the rapid stream.

This time they were better fortified against the cold; for the elk-hide was a great protection, and the man who stood up to pole this time was Slocum.

They pushed out into the stream some miles ahead of the Indians, and soon found that the latter were losing ground, on account of the crowd in their boat.

The cold was no longer so piercing and the wind was falling all the time, while the clear green sunset portended a calmer night.

There was no moon; but for all that they could see their pursuers put in to the shore as soon as it grew dark and George told Slocum:

"They won't follow us no further now. If it was daylight they'd keep on forever, but the dark skeers all Injuns."

And again he proved to be right; for when the morning dawned on them at last half-numbed with the cold in spite of the blanket and elk-hide, the bull boat was floating on the broad stream of the Missouri, and they were all alone with the norther nearly blown out and white fleecy clouds dappling the blue sky all over its bright expanse.

"We're gitting nigh Gladstone," said George, heartily, "and if it hadn't ha' been for you, Mr. Slocum, we'd never have done what we have. You was born to make a good plainsman, I reckon."

"A good surveyor, I hope," answered the young man, cheerfully. "By Jove, George, now it's all over, I begin to think we've done something to be proud of."

"Done something? I reckon we have," cried the plainsman. "We've done what nary white man never did yet, got into Sitting Bull's camp and got out alive, and that's a good deal of itself."

"But that's not all we've done," interrupted Seth Slocum. "We've got what we went for, and what you said I couldn't get."

"I'll own that; take it all back. I didn't think ye could, but ye did."

"And now comes the best part of the whole journey."

"And what's that?"

"Gitting home again, George. I wonder if they'll arrest us for running the guards and stampeding Major Ireland's stock?"

Montana George grinned.

"We don't know nothin' 'bout Major Ireland's stock. 'Tain't no biz of ours if he let his horses be tuk by Injuns. Reckon Sitting Bull's got most of them now."

"You are wrong. You forget the norther."

"I don't forget nothin'. That 'ere norther is well-nigh over now, and you kin bet your boots that some of 'em has got down to them hosses by this time. No, no, Sitting Bull's got Major Ireland's hosses, and if he hadn't got 'em I ain't so sure we could have skinned out as we did."

"Why?"

"'Cause it must have made them Injuns feel good, to see such a prize of hosses and packs coming in without the trouble of fighting for it. That's what saved our lives in my opinion. If we'd ha' gone in bare-handed, they'd have roasted us for spite, to get some fun out of us."

The little bull boat floated safely down the broad and turbid stream of the Missouri and in due time arrived at Gladstone.

The two comrades did not make any triumphal entry into the city with their curious craft, which might have attracted too much attention and comment, besides attracting the inquiries of Major Ireland and his friends at Fort Gladstone.

On the contrary, they landed in the night far below the city, took the celebrated robe of Sitting Bull from its basket frame and proceeded to Gladstone on foot.

It was on the next day when Mr. Russell, chief engineer, was sitting in his office, gloomily conversing with two of the rich directors, who had already sunk a million in the road, and saw no chance of gaining the subsidy they had hoped for on account of the missing link in the last survey, that a tap came at the door, and a young man walked in, neatly clad and shaven, and said, quietly:

"Good-morning, Mr. Russell. I've come back with the book, sir."

Russell stared at him stupidly. For a little while he did not know him, asking:

"What book? Who are you?"

"I am Seth Slocum, sir," said the young man smiling. "I was an ax-man on the summer survey and Mr. Graves put me on as assistant advance engineer. You gave me leave to go to Sitting Bull's camp and see if I could get back the lost field-book. It cost three thousand dollars to fit us out and it's all gone. But here's the book!"

And he threw it on the table before the three magnates, who clutched it eagerly when Russell exclaimed:

"By heavens it's true. The road's saved and your fortune's made, young man. Ask what you wish you shall have it. Shall he not, Mr. Plutus?"

Mr. Plutus was turning over the leaves of the book rapidly and he looked up to answer:

"Anything in reason. Do you know the young man, Mr. Russell?"

"I do, sir, now he speaks. I sent him out as a forlorn hope, never expecting to see him again, but he's done what no other man ever did before. He ought to be superintendent of the road, or I shall resign my place at once."

"He shall have the place," hurriedly said Mr. Plutus. "But how in the name of wonder did you do all this, young man?"

Slocum smiled.

"I did it because I found out the secret of Sitting Bull," was all the answer he made.

THE END.

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